# HAND-BOOKS FOR BIBLE CLASSES

# THE CHURCH

*Professor Binnie, D.D.*

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REV. MARCUS DODS, D.D.,

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*THE CHURCH.—PROFESSOR BINNIE, D.D.*

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# THE CHURCH.

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# CONTENTS.


| CHAP. | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | WHAT IS THE CHURCH? AND WHERE IS IT TO BE FOUND? | 1 |
| II. | CHRIST AND THE CHURCH, | 19 |
| III. | THE CHIEF END OF THE CHURCH, | 37 |
| IV. | THE CHRISTIAN ORDINANCES, | 52 |
| | SECT. I. Who may appoint Ordinances? | 53 |
| | II. The Word, | 61 |
| | III. The Sacraments, | 68 |
| | (*a*) Baptism, | 71 |
| | (*b*) The Lord's Supper, | 76 |
| | IV. Prayer, Praise, and the Benediction, | 83 |
| | V. Giving to the Lord, | 94 |
| | VI. Church Discipline, | 98 |
| | VII. The Sabbath, | 105 |
| V. | THE POLITY OF THE CHURCH, | 111 |
| | SECT. I. The Holy Ministry, | 120 |
| | II. The Ruling Eldership, | 122 |
| | III. The Associating of Congregations under a Common Government, | 131 |
| | IV. The Concurrence of Popular Election and Official Ordination, | 132 |

# THE CHURCH.

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## CHAPTER I.

### WHAT IS THE CHURCH? AND WHERE IS IT TO BE FOUND?

THE Greek word translated Church in the New Testament is **Ecclesia**, and signifies *a meeting*, *an assembly*, or *congregation*. It was in common use among the Greek states to denote the assembly of the citizens summoned by the public crier; although it was occasionally employed in a looser sense, to denote any sort of public meeting. This classical use of the word occurs in Acts xix., where by the *Ecclesia*, or 'assembly,' is meant, in ver. 39, a regular or official assembly, and in vers. 32 and 41 a fortuitous concourse of people. Compare Acts vii. 38, where the assembly or congregation of the children of Israel is described as 'the Church in the wilderness.' In all the other places where the term occurs in the New Testament, it denotes the Christian assembly, the company of Christ's people, the congregation of the faithful. This is the sacred use of the term; and it is that with which alone we have to do at present.

There are several subordinate varieties of meaning, which, in view of the great importance of the word, it is well to distinguish. (*a*) Much the most frequent use of Ecclesia, in the New Testament, is to denote some particular Christian society, the company of Christians associated for the worship and service of God in a given locality. Thus we read of the Church at Jerusalem, the

Church at Corinth, the Churches of Galatia. Sometimes the societies thus designated were too numerous to meet together in one place. It was certainly so with the Church at Jerusalem, where the membership embraced many thousands (Acts xxi. 20). These must have constituted a plurality of congregations, yet they were one *Ecclesia*, and as such were subject to the oversight of one company of elders. We have reason to suppose that the same was the case also in the Churches of Ephesus, of Corinth, of Rome. More commonly, the local Churches spoken of in the New Testament appear to have been societies so small that their members were able to worship together in one place. Any considerable company of Christians, regularly associated for the worship of God by Jesus Christ and for mutual edification in Christ, is, in Scripture phrase, a Christian Church.—(*b*) Scarcely distinguishable from the meaning just noticed is that found in a few texts, where the term denotes *the company of professing Christians as actually met for worship* (1 Cor. xiv. 19, 35). To speak or to keep silence in the Church, is to speak or keep silence in the public assembly of the faithful. For it is hardly necessary to explain that the custom of applying the term to the *building* in which the Christian assemblies were held, did not come in till after the age of the apostles.—(*c*) In several texts the term denotes *the whole body of professing Christians throughout the world, or throughout some particular region.* 'The Church of God,' which Paul persecuted (1 Cor. xv. 9; Gal. i. 13), was the Christian community in general, and particularly the Christians throughout Syria. This is the sense in which the word occurs in the all-important text, Matt. xvi. 18: 'Upon this rock I will build my Church.' An interesting and important example of this sense is found in Acts ix. 31 (Revised Version): 'So the Church throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified.'—(*d*) More frequently Ecclesia denotes *the whole company of those who have been given to Christ by the Father, and whom He will present faultless in the great day* (Eph. v. 23, 25, 27, 30; Heb. xii. 23). This is the Church of God in the widest and grandest sense;

the mystical body of Christ, consisting of all the saved, all who shall be found in the great day united to Christ as His living members, all who shall be found in 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost.'

*Observation* 1.—**Church.**—It is hardly necessary to observe that this English word has no etymological connection with the *Ecclesia* of the Greek Scriptures. It is derived from a quite different Greek word, *Kyriake*, signifying *dominical, pertaining to the Lord;* a word which occurs only twice in the Greek New Testament, namely, with reference to the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day. The Greek Fathers began very early to use it to denote *the Lord's house, the edifice in which the Christian assembly met.* See Suicer's *Thesaurus, sub voce* κυριακόν. In this sense the term was borrowed from the Greeks by the Gothic nations, and became the German *Kirche*, the Dutch *Kerke*, the Scottish *Kirk*, and the English *Church.* Although originally applied (as we have seen) to the place of worship, it has long been used as synonymous with the New Testament *Ecclesia*, and is the word by which the latter is rendered in the Teutonic versions. In several of the earliest Protestant English versions it was discarded and the word *congregation* was used instead (Tyndale's version, 1534, and Cranmer's, 1539). But the new word did not take. Accordingly, the Genevan version, 1557, began to revert to the term *Church*, which had been nearly 300 years in use in the Wycliffite versions; and this term alone was used in the Authorized Version, 1611. The Westminster revisers, while retaining the exclusive use of *Church* in the text, have in several places inserted *congregation* in the margin as an alternative rendering.

*Observation* 2.—**Ecclesia.**—Seeing that in the Greek classics an Ecclesia means simply a public meeting, more particularly 'an assembly of the citizens summoned by the crier,' many scholarly writers contend that the Ecclesia spoken of by our Lord and the apostles must be understood, in like manner, to mean simply *an assembly of Christians.* They maintain that the sacred notions which have long attached themselves to our word *Church* are later accretions, of which we must disabuse ourselves if we would get at the original and authentic conception of the Christian Ecclesia. The contention is not without solid grounds. There are without doubt certain high-church circles in which the authentic conception of the Christian society is almost lost sight of, through want of care to distinguish between the New Testament Ecclesia and the Ecclesia of a later age. This is true; yet we must beware of falling into error in the opposite extreme. Classical scholars are apt to forget that the word *Ecclesia* had long been in use, in the Greek version of the Old Testament, to denote the *congregation*

*of the children of Israel*, and the *congregation of the righteous*, before it was employed by Christ to denote the Christian society. It had thus become consecrated, in the minds of Bible-reading Jews and proselytes, by many sacred associations quite similar to those which attach to the word *Church* among ourselves.

Putting ourselves, then, under the guidance of the divine Word, and forgetting for the present the controversies which have been raised, we find that the Church, or company of the faithful, is in Scripture presented to our faith in three phases, or at three distinct stages. It comes into view as the Local Church ; as the entire Community of Christians dispersed through the world ; and as the Bride of Christ, the total company of the redeemed. In other words, the Church to which we are to join ourselves in loving fellowship is, in the first instance, the company of Christ's professing people in our own neighbourhood, associated for His worship and service ; this is the Local Church. In the second instance, it is the company of those throughout the world who profess the Christian religion. This is the Catholic Visible Church. In the third instance, it is the entire innumerable company of those who have been or shall yet be brought unto God by Christ—the congregation of the saved. This is the Catholic Invisible Church.

Let us contemplate the Church in these successive phases.

**I. The Local Church.**—It is the duty of those who have been brought to God by Christ to associate themselves together for His worship and service, and for their mutual edification (Matt. xviii. 17, xxviii. 19, 20; 1 Cor. xi. 24; Heb. x. 23–25). This is Christ's command ; and the Spirit of Christ working in the hearts of the faithful impels them, as by a gracious instinct, to draw towards one another and to take pleasure in each other's society. To brethren in Christ it is a good and pleasant thing to dwell together (Ps. cxxxiii. 1). When the faithful in a town or neighbourhood are constituted into a society for the worship of God, they with their children form a Christian Church, and are entitled to that allegiance and support which, by the law of

Christ, are due to the Church of Christ. Individual believers coming into the locality are bound to seek admission into their fellowship; when admitted, they are bound to submit to brotherly oversight and admonition; and if they commit grievous sin, the society is bound to exclude them from fellowship until they give evidence of penitence. Such a company of the faithful as has been described is as truly a Church of Christ as were the first Churches of Jerusalem and Antioch, of Ephesus and Corinth and Rome. Every such society has the promise of Christ's presence in its assemblies, with all the manifold blessings which that presence brings in its train; and this, whether the society consists of a handful of people, like the Church at Cenchrea, or of a circle of congregations with an aggregate membership of many thousands, like the Church at Jerusalem.

It must be admitted that this account of the Local Church, the ecclesiastical unit, although correct so far as it goes, requires to be supplemented, if it is to meet the complexities of modern Christendom. To say that the Christian Church in any given place is the Christian community of the place,—the company of those in it who profess to be Christians, and are associated for the worship and service of the Lord,—might be a definition sufficient to meet the necessities of an inquirer in the first age of the Church, and may still suffice for some exceptionally favoured spots; but in most places something more specific is required. There is hardly a thriving town in all Christendom in which the inquirer is not confronted with several societies, strongly opposed to each other in their beliefs and practices, and yet all claiming to be Churches of Christ. What is worse, there is hardly a neighbourhood in which there will not be found among these rival societies one or two, at least, which proudly isolate themselves from all the rest, and even from one another, each proclaiming itself to be the one catholic Church of Christ, the only true Christian Church in the place, and branding all the others as heretical or schismatic associations. Worst of all, it is too plain that there are societies claiming to be Christian Churches which are no such thing, but are utterly

Christless and secular. It is certain, therefore, that no man can safely join himself to a given society simply because it professes to be the Christian Church of the place. And this being so, the question must be faced, How am I to distinguish the Church which has the promises, from all false pretenders to the name? How shall I make sure that a given society, which invites me into its fellowship, will be found to be truly a Christian Church? What are the distinctive marks by which Christ's Church may be known?

One principal note of the true Church is *the word of God purely taught and embraced.* 'Where thou findest the word,' said Luther, 'doubtless a Church is there.' Christ's own teaching is to the same effect. He tells us that His sheep may be distinguished by this token, that they know His voice, and follow Him; but a stranger they will not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers. When I find, on visiting some congregation of professing Christians, that the joyful sound makes itself clearly heard among them,—that the gospel is faithfully preached, attentively heard, and to all appearance lovingly embraced,—I may well presume that it is a true Church of Christ.

There are other notes which, although secondary, are valuable as affording additional evidence of the presence of the true Church. One of these is *the scriptural administration of the Sacraments.* The case of the Society of Friends warns us, indeed, to beware of putting these ordinances on a level with the knowledge and belief of the gospel, and making them absolutely necessary to the being of a true Church. The Friends have disused the Sacraments; yet it is plain that many members of their society belong also to the flock of Christ. The comparatively subordinate place assigned to the Sacraments by our Lord and the apostles suggests a similar lesson. Still, the Sacraments are notes of the Church in this respect, that when we find them annexed to the word, they strengthen very materially the proof afforded by the presence of the word, that the society which enjoys it and them, enjoys also the gracious presence of Christ Himself and the continual ministration

of the Spirit, and forms part of the true Church of Christ. More will have to be said afterwards on this subject in connection with the Christian Ordinances. For the present, it may be enough to observe that, although the Sacraments and other external ordinances of Christianity, since they are external things, do not afford sure proof that *this or that individual who receives them* is a living member of Christ, nevertheless the presence of these ordinances in a given place affords presumptive evidence that Christ and His true Church are there. Let it be remembered that the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the Sacraments, and the other Christian ordinances, are Christ's institutions. They are His, not merely as having been originally appointed by Him, but as having been sent by Him to every place now favoured by their presence, and as being preserved by Him in their purity from age to age. They are exotics in the world; so that if we find them existing and flourishing in any place, we may well conclude that the Lord is in that place in the power of His Holy Spirit, and that the society which enjoys them does not lie altogether beyond the pale of His Church. Borrowing the beautiful language of the parable, we may describe a faithful, loving ministry of word and Sacraments as Christ's candle, lighted that He may seek with it some lost piece of silver. Now Christ, we may be sure, does not light His candle but where He has some piece of silver to seek. When I see Christ's lighted candle, I may be sure that souls are being brought to God. Where I find the word faithfully taught and other ordinances purely administered, I may well presume that the true Church—the congregation of the saints—has more or less of an existence there. And this is what we mean when we teach that the pure preaching of the word and the scriptural celebration of the other Christian ordinances constitute a good note of the true Church.

A third note of the true Church is *the prevalence of vital religion among the members*. In certain circumstances this note may be more trustworthy than any other. If my knowledge of a given society of professing Christians is not limited to the few facts

which may be observed by any one who is present occasionally at their meetings for public worship; if I have been able to follow the members to their homes, and to make myself thoroughly acquainted with their manner of life; and if the result has been to assure me that the society is largely made up of persons who adorn the doctrine of Christ, who do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with God, I need not hesitate to regard it as a veritable Christian Church, and to act in relation to it accordingly. Our Lord's rule for trying teachers by, is equally valid for the trial of Churches also: 'By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?' (Matt. vii. 16). The flock of Christ is known by the presence of His sheep, rather than by the shape of the fold. This third note does not, by any means, supersede the two formerly mentioned. It cannot safely be applied except in the case of societies one has known intimately and for some time; whereas those others can be applied forthwith. On the other hand, it excels them in two respects, being at once peculiarly persuasive and peculiarly relevant to the nature of the case. The Church (it must never be forgotten) is, in its proper nature, the company of Christ's true people, the congregation of the saints, the society of those whom Christ has called by His grace, who believe His word and hope in His mercy. A particular society has a right to the promises, and a right to receive the honour and obedience due to a Church of Christ, only in the proportion in which it consists of true Christians.

It is certain, indeed, that there is not now, and never was, in all the world, a single considerable society wholly made up of true Christians. Even in the little company of the Twelve there was a traitor. Christ's net has always enclosed evil fishes among the good; and the evil have not seldom outnumbered the good. But this is no reason why we should hesitate to affirm, that no society is entitled to the honour and obedience due to Christ's Church, except in the proportion in which it consists of persons who are Christ's true people. It only proves that no external

society on earth is warranted to claim, or accept, in full and perfect measure the honours due to the Bride of Christ. The early Church at Rome was a society whose faith was celebrated throughout the whole world; nevertheless it was charged not to be high-minded, but to fear (Rom. i. 8, xi. 20). Church-standing—the right to be regarded and treated as an integral part of Christ's Church—is by no means a fixed and invariable property. It may exist in extremely various degrees. There are societies, calling themselves by the name of Christ, which are so much infested with dangerous error, so feeble and sickly in their religious life, and in respect of holiness and Christian service so little distinguishable from the surrounding world, that it is hard to say whether they are Churches at all. There are other societies, whose knowledge of the truth is so ample, whose worship is so scriptural and pure, whose faith and hope are so strong, whose good works are so abundant, that it would be sheer perversity to doubt that they are true Churches, and that Christ is in them of a truth. The graces which so abound in them are the fruits and tokens of Christ's presence; 'the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God' (Phil. i. 11).

*Observation.*—**The Notes of the True Church.**—These are laid down by John Knox in the Scots Confession, 1560, as follows:—'The notes, signs, and assured tokens whereby the immaculate spouse of Christ Jesus is known from the horrible harlot, the Kirk malignant, we affirm are neither Antiquity, Title usurped, lineal Descent, Place appointed, nor Multitude of men approving one error. [The allusion is to the notes commonly insisted on by the Papists, viz. the title Catholic; antiquity and uninterrupted continuance; an unbroken succession of bishops at Rome from the time of the apostles; the great multitude and variety of faithful members.] . . . The notes, therefore, of the true Kirk of God we believe, confess, and avow to be, First, the true preaching of the word of God, in the which God has revealed Himself to us. . . . Secondly, the right administration of the Sacraments, which must be annexed to the word and promise of God, to seal and confirm the same in our hearts. Lastly, Ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's word prescribed, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished. Wheresoever, then, these

notes are seen, and of any time continue, be the number [of the persons] never so few above two or three, there, without all doubt, is the true Kirk of Christ, who, according to His promise, is in the midst of them: not that *universal* of which we have before spoken, but *particular*, such as was in Corinthus, Galatia, Ephesus, and other places in which the ministry was planted by Paul, and which were of himself named the Kirks of God. And such like we, the inhabitants of the realm of Scotland, professors of Christ Jesus, confess us to have in our cities, towns, and places reformed' (chap. xviii.).

Our fathers, in thus making the true preaching of the word and the right administration of the Sacraments the principal notes of the true Church, simply repeated the language of the earlier Protestant Confessions. Thus Luther and the Saxon Reformers had, in the Augsburg Confession (1530), defined the Church to be 'the congregation of saints (or general assembly of the faithful) wherein the gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.' Compare Article xix. of the Church of England:—'The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's appointment, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.'—While thus far keeping close by the earlier Confessions, the Scots Confession differs from them in two remarkable features:—(1) In making faithful church discipline a third note of the true Church. Curiously enough, this was done also, about the same time, in the 28th of the Homilies, printed by public authority to be preached in the English Church. (2) In frankly recognising the right of the body of the faithful in every city, or town, or district, to be regarded as a distinct Church. The same thing had been done by Calvin in his *Institutes* (Book IV. i. 9). This deserves to be noted, as showing how erroneous is the notion, that according to the Presbyterian theory the proper ecclesiastical unit is the Church of an entire nation.

In one important respect the definition of the Church common to all these earliest Protestant Confessions is open to exception. The features absolutely necessary to the *being* of a Church are not sufficiently distinguished from those which are only necessary to its *wellbeing*. In the course of a generation or two, men began to feel that, however necessary Church discipline may be to the health of the Christian society, it would be wrong to say that a Church without discipline is not a Church at all. Even in regard to the Sacraments men felt themselves shut up to a similar change of view; for surely neither Baptists nor Quakers are to be summarily unchurched. The effect of this change of sentiment is seen in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Chap. xxv. of this Confession is probably the wisest and best statement of the Bible

doctrine of the Church anywhere to be found in such short compass. According to it, the only thing indispensable to the *being* of the Christian Church is 'the profession of the true religion;' the other things — purity of doctrine, of worship, of discipline, and the like—are mentioned as excellent attributes of particular Churches, by which we may measure the degree of their purity. The reader will do well to study carefully the whole chapter. The following are the sections relating to the Catholic Visible Church, and the Local or Particular Church :—

'§ 2. The Visible Church, which is also Catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

'§ 4. This Catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

'§ 5. The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall always be a Church on earth to worship God according to His will.'

**II. The Church Catholic.**—The Church to which allegiance is due is, in the first instance, without doubt the Local Church; for only with the Church of one's own city or province is it possible for one, in person, to enter into full external fellowship. It does not follow, however, that no allegiance at all is due to the general commonwealth of Christians. A devout Jew in the time of our Lord, besides being a member of the synagogue of his own city, felt himself to belong to the great Hebrew commonwealth, the House of Israel. In like manner, Christians owe allegiance not only to the Church of their own city or province, but to the general Church of Christ, the great community of those who throughout the world profess and call themselves Christians.

Regarding the exact nature of the allegiance due by the individual believer to the general Church of Christ, and still more regarding the nature and extent of the fellowship which the Churches of Christ throughout the world ought to have with each

other, it is not possible to lay down any very exact rule which will apply universally. Still, there are certain points on which one may speak without doubt.

1. Church members, on removing to parts beyond the limits of their mother Church, are not at liberty to hold aloof from Christ's people among whom their lot may be cast. They ought to seek them out, and to desire admission into their fellowship. And, conversely, it is the duty of Christian Churches to receive into their fellowship professing Christians from other parts who are resident for the time, or have come to settle, within their bounds. 'Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification ; as also in relieving each other in outward things according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus' (Confession of Faith, xxvi. 2). In order that this reciprocal communion may be fostered and at the same time guarded against abuse, it is expedient that Church members removing from one country or province to another carry with them testimonials of Church membership, which may be delivered as 'epistles of commendation' to the Churches within whose bounds Providence may order their lot (2 Cor. iii. 1). This was the custom of the primitive Churches, and ought to be conserved. No doubt a Church may be so remiss or unfaithful in its practice as to forfeit the right to have its testimonials of membership respected and endorsed, without question, by other Churches. An avowed enemy of the truth, or an openly wicked man, is not to be received into Church fellowship simply because he has brought with him a testimonial of membership from another Church. Still, the general rule laid down in the passage just cited from the Confession of Faith has clear warrant of Scripture, and is to be observed.

2. Churches which are so far agreed in doctrine and Church polity as to render such association possible, ought to cultivate

friendly relations with each other, in order that they may with one voice bear witness to the truth, may with conjoint forces do the work pertaining to them in common in the defence and propagation of the faith, and may strengthen and admonish one another. There are many ways in which particular Churches, situated in different localities, may cordially acknowledge each other as integral parts of the one Church catholic, and may maintain wholesome and fruitful communion with each other in that character, without ceasing to maintain a distinct ecclesiastical existence. The length to which Churches locally separate are bound to go in endeavouring to bring about *external organic unity*, is a different and very difficult question. Christ has laid down no clear law on the point; and the matter must be determined, in every particular case, by considerations of Christian expediency and the general principles of Scripture. The Romish divines, in arguing for unity of external organization as belonging to the very idea of the one catholic visible Church, lay great stress on the analogy of the Old Testament Church. And no doubt a close external unity, although seldom attained in fact, was enjoined in the law. Certain of the most prominent ordinances of the Levitical system were so framed that they could only be celebrated at one altar and under the presidency of one high priest. But all this has passed away. It is remarkable that, under the gospel, there is not one ordinance of divine appointment which requires for its due celebration the concurrent action of the Church catholic—not one ordinance but may be duly celebrated by any one of a hundred particular Churches. The argument in favour of the union of the whole Church of Christ in one external polity, which is deduced from the analogy of the Hebrew commonwealth, falls, therefore, to the ground. The utmost length we are warranted to go in this direction, is to insist that particular or local Churches ought to maintain friendly relations with each other, so as to be mutually helpful in the word and work of Christ.

3. The question regarding the kind and degree of external

unity obligatory on the several particular Churches which hold the Head, assumes its most perplexing form in the case of rival bodies occupying the same territory. It is a fact, however one may account for it, that in all Christian countries there exists, side by side, a plurality of religious bodies, all of them entitled to be regarded in the judgment of charity as Christian Churches, and yet differing from each other so much that they cannot live and work together, effectively, within one ecclesiastical system. Let the man who doubts this try to frame a plan by which evangelical Friends, high-church Episcopalians, and orthodox Presbyterians shall live together in one bond of Church fellowship, and yet none of the three be obliged to do what they believe to be forbidden, or to omit what they believe to be commanded by Christ. The thing is impossible. Christian men who differ so widely in their views of truth and duty must either suppress their convictions or serve Christ in separate 'denominations.'

It is a mistake to suppose, as many do, that this evil of separate denominations is only of recent origin. So far from being peculiar to modern Christendom, it is older than the Christian Church. Under the Old Testament there long subsisted, side by side, within the land of promise, two houses of Israel—the two rival kingdoms of Ephraim and Judah. This schism originated in sin, and the continuation of it was not without sin. It was a great and disastrous evil. Yet it would be a hasty conclusion to suppose that, sinful and hurtful as it was, it involved the falling away of either party from the commonwealth of Israel and the covenants of promise. Strange as it may seem to those who think external unity an indispensable note of the true Church, it is a plain and certain fact that neither of the two rival houses of Israel ceased to have an interest in the covenant and the promises. In both of them the Lord continued to raise up great prophets, and to give other tokens that His Spirit remained among them. That similar schisms exist in the gospel Church is not without sin. There exist side by side Churches which equal Ephraim and Judah in the bitterness of

their rivalry. The fact is sufficiently humiliating and deplorable.

An evil so great in itself, and which presents such a stumbling-block to the unbelieving world, ought to cause great searchings of heart to the Churches concerned. When movements are set on foot for the reunion of sister Churches, it has been too much the fashion to act as if the burden of proof lay on the promoters of union, and that as a matter of course the Churches should remain as they are, unless stringent reasons can be given for taking action. In reality the burden of proof lies on those who desire to abide as they are. The union of sister Churches occupying the same territory is obligatory, unless stringent reasons are forthcoming to show that it cannot take place without the sacrifice of truth or duty.

All this is true, and ought to be laid to heart. Yet we must not allow our zeal for this kind of external unity to betray us into the error of making it one of the essentials of the Church. The obligation lying on the Churches of each locality to be conjoined in one ecclesiastical organization furnishes no excuse for the arrogance of those prelatic bodies, which make so much of their external unity as to pronounce all other Churches to be no Churches at all, but mere unauthorized associations, having no right to the promises, and no warrant to expect the gracious presence of Christ and the regular ministration of the Spirit in their assemblies. Theories about unity must not be suffered to override the testimony of facts. The raising up of Elijah and Elisha proved that Ephraim had not been cut off from the covenant society; and there are similar facts quite as unequivocal, and far more numerous, which demonstrate that the non-prelatic Churches are abundantly favoured with the presence of Christ and the working of His Spirit. As if for the purpose of rebuking and putting to shame the disdainful exclusiveness which is so apt to infect certain ecclesiastical bodies, the Lord seems to take pleasure in raising up choice saints and admirable divines, powerful preachers and apostolic missionaries, not only in the great

historical Churches, but occasionally also in the obscurest of the Christian denominations.

**III. The Invisible Catholic Church.**—Scripture teaches us, as we have seen, to look beyond the local Churches of the saints to which our allegiance is primarily due; to look also beyond the general community of the faithful militant here on the earth, and to behold stretching far away, behind and above these, a vast company of men and women and children, which has been brought to God and gathered into one by its means—a company still on the increase, and which is destined to embrace the whole number of God's redeemed. This vast society is the catholic invisible Church. It is called catholic, because it includes all God's people, not only of the seed of Abraham, but of all nations. It is called invisible, because much the greater part of those who constitute it are either already in heaven or are yet unborn, and are thus beyond the reach of our sight; and also because, of the professing Christians who are at present on earth, we cannot with certainty know who are His disciples indeed, and who are not. This catholic Church being thus invisible, is the object of faith, not yet of sight. 'We believe in the holy catholic Church.' This does not mean that to us its existence is uncertain. On the contrary, it is to us an article of firm belief. As we believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and in the forgiveness of sins, so also we believe in the catholic Church.

This catholic Church of the redeemed will be best understood by reverting in thought to the still more numerous society out of which it is being gathered. We know that there is such a society as the human family, the race which has Adam for its father, and which in Adam has fallen away from God. We know this to our cost, for we ourselves belong to the family, and have inherited its woful patrimony of sin. But if we know that there is a fallen race, we believe that God has resolved to gather out of that race a chosen people, who are to be recovered from the fall; we believe that Christ is a Second Adam; and that

there have been given to Him a company that no man can number, belonging to all nations and tongues—children of God, now scattered abroad, whom He is to gather into one. We do not profess either to have seen this society or to have discovered its existence by the force of our reason. What we know of it rests on the testimony of God. On that testimony, we as firmly believe that there is a general Church of redeemed men as that there is a race of fallen men. Not only so. This faith of ours in the Church is a living and active principle. True faith is never a mere passive assent to truth. When we believe in Christ, we receive and rest upon Him for salvation. When we believe in the forgiveness of sins, we with grateful hearts accept God's pardon. So also when we believe in the holy catholic Church, we cordially embrace it, and cast in our lot among its members. As far as lies in us, we join ourselves to its fellowship. The citizenship and portion we thenceforward desire and embrace are 'the inheritance among all them that are sanctified' (Acts xx. 32). Our heart's desire and prayer is: 'Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation; that I may see the good of Thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, that I may glory with Thine inheritance' (Ps. cvi. 4, 5).

One who duly reflects on this practical and living quality of faith will not fall into the error of imagining that this article regarding the Church of God is a vague and barren sentiment. That it is a sentiment may be allowed. It is not a plain, sharply defined thought, capable of being easily expressed and easily grasped. Our minds find difficulty in realizing the fact that when we believed in Christ we were introduced into a living fellowship with all true Christians throughout the world, in virtue of which they and we form one brotherhood. Still more difficult do we find it to grasp the thought that this living fellowship embraces all the faithful who ever lived,—that when we believed we sat down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. viii. 11). But who will venture to allege that this is a barren senti-

ment? A sentiment may be one of the most potent and fruitful things in existence. To a native of England it is anything but an idle imagination to think that the long roll of English worthies from King Alfred downwards are his kinsmen, and that the sun never sets on his people. The sentiment moulds the character and influences the conduct of Englishmen all the world over. One can perceive, in like manner, that the sentiment of Roman citizenship influenced even the strong mind of Paul, and bred in him many a 'Roman thought.' And is it to be imagined that the thought of citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem, of inheritance in the venerable and boundless commonwealth of God's redeemed, can fail to elevate and strengthen the mind which has been really enabled to take it in? It is a thought in which the psalmists and prophets and apostles find great comfort; and in the description of the felicities of the gospel Church which imparts so much grandeur to the 12th chapter of the Hebrews, this particular felicity occupies a central place: 'Ye are come to the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are enrolled in heaven.'

1. *Give the history of the English word* 'Church' *and the Scotch word* 'Kirk.'
2. *How often does our Lord speak of the Church by name? Give His exact words.*
3. *Enumerate the principal senses in which the term* 'Church' *occurs in the New Testament, giving an example of each.*
4. *By what marks may one know whether a given professing Church is really a true Church of Christ?*
5. *What, according to the Papists, are the notes of the true Church?*
6. *What is the visible catholic Church?*
7. *'If you are sincere in saying I believe in the holy catholic Church, you will join us; for there is not a Church on earth but ours which will dare so much as to call itself the one holy catholic Church. No other Church possesses a real, visible, organic unity, embracing men out of all nations and tongues.' How is this Romanist claim to be met?*
8. *What is it to believe in the invisible catholic Church?*

## CHAPTER II.

### CHRIST AND THE CHURCH.

To men of the world, who can only look at the Church from the outside, it appears to be merely one of several societies similar in origin and character, among which the adherents of the several religions of the world are divided. As the followers of Mahomet constitute the Moslem community, and the followers of Buddha constitute the Buddhist community, so the followers of Christ constitute the Christian Church. This way of regarding the matter has enough of truth to make it serve for certain superficial purposes; nevertheless, it entirely misses the proper nature of the Christian institute. Even the well-considered definitions above cited from the Protestant Confessions are defective here. To say that the Church is *the company of the faithful*, or *the congregation of the saints*, expresses only one side of the truth. The other and brighter side is expressed in the declaration of the Scriptures that *the Church is the body of Christ*. The Church is the body of which Christ is the Head—the community of those who, being knit to Christ by faith, 'hold the head.' The Church thus lives, and moves, and has its being in Christ. So intimate is the union between Him and it that the Scriptures sometimes speak as if they were identical. Christ and His people together constitute one body, which may take its name either from Him or them. 'As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ' (1 Cor. xii. 12).

This subject of Christ's Headship, besides lying at the threshold

of the Bible doctrine of the Church, is invested with uncommon interest for us by reason of the part played by it in certain memorable passages in the history of the Reformed Churches, in Scotland and elsewhere. It will be proper to consider as fully as our limits will permit, first, the truth itself as taught in Scripture; and then, secondly, certain practical deductions from it about which men's minds have been much exercised.

I. The Headship attributed to Christ in Scripture has two distinct functions. He is Head of the Church both in respect to authority and rule, and in respect to vital influence. His relation to the Church is at once that of a king to his subjects, and that of a vine-stock to the branches which draw from it their nutriment.

1. That in respect to **authority and rule** Christ is the Head of the Church is so plainly taught in Scripture that formal proof is unnecessary. This Headship is the principal part of the dominion which has been bestowed upon Him as the reward of His sufferings. It is the brightest jewel in His crown-royal. The points at which it comes into view are chiefly the following:—

(1) *Christ instituted the Church* (Matt. xvi. 18, xxviii. 18–20). Many societies are voluntary associations and nothing more. Having been instituted by the private and voluntary action of public-spirited men, with a view to the promotion of objects in which they were interested, they exist simply in virtue of the mutual agreement of the members. They make no claim to exist by divine right. Certain other societies rest on the deeper and more stable basis of divine institution. It is so with the Family and the State. These spring out of the constitution of human nature, and possess divine authority within their respective domains. Parents have a divine right to rule their children, and to bring them up in the nurture of the Lord. Magistrates, in like manner, have a divine right to do justice between man and man; for they are God's ministers, appointed to execute His wrath on evil-doers (Rom. xiii. 4). It is to this honourable

order of divinely-ordained societies that the Church belongs. The Churches of Christ throughout the world, being, equally with the families and commonwealths existing throughout the world, of divine appointment, have equally with them a claim to exist and act by divine right. In saying this it is not necessary to deny that Churches are, in any sense, voluntary associations. They are voluntary in this sense, that no man is to be retained in membership against his will. But they are not voluntary in the sense of having no warrant to exist except the consent of the members. The Church is a form of society ordained by Christ; and it is the right and duty of His people to gather themselves into Churches, and serve Him as Churches, according to His word. They are as stringently obliged, and as perfectly entitled, to do this, as parents are to rule their children in the fear of God, or magistrates to do justice between man and man.

In one important respect the divine right of the Church differs from that of the Family and the State. The latter right is founded in nature, whereas the former is founded in grace. Families and states, since they spring out of the original constitution of human nature, exist by divine right all the world over; whereas Churches, since they originate in Christ's redemptive work, have no right to exercise government except over those whom Christ has purchased to Himself with His blood, and whose hearts He has made willing by the power of His Spirit. Coercion has no place in His kingdom (John xviii. 36–38). Important as Christ's relations to the Family and the State undoubtedly are, it is certain that He is not their Head in the sense in which He is Head of the Church; for the Church only is His body.

(2) *Christ has prescribed the ordinances in which the Church is to worship God* (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20). Every one can see how true this is in regard to the two Christian ordinances which are purely positive in their nature. Baptism and the Lord's Supper owe their inestimable value entirely to the circumstance that they are Christ's appointments. Christ having appointed them

and annexed to them the promise of His presence, we have warrant to expect that when we celebrate them according to His word He will come to us and bless us. The same principle holds good in regard to all the other ordinances of worship appointed in the word. In this matter of religious ordinances, Christ only is entitled to legislate, and He has not delegated His authority to any other. On the contrary, it is plain from the reason annexed to the second commandment that the Lord guards with peculiar jealousy His exclusive authority in this matter.

*Observation.*—This truth, that Christ, as the Head of the Church, is its only lawgiver, and His word its only rule, is an article of faith for which the Scottish Church has been specially called to witness and to suffer. It was clearly stated by John Knox, in a treatise written ten years before the accomplishment of our Reformation. 'I would ask if that Jesus Christ be not King and Head of His Kirk? This will no man deny. If He be King, then must He do the office of a king, which is not only to guide, rule, and defend his subjects, but also to make and statute laws; which laws only are his subjects bound to obey. . . . Then it becometh the Kirk of Jesus Christ to advert what He speaketh, to receive and embrace His laws, and *where He maketh end of speaking or lawgiving, there to rest;* so that all the power of the Kirk is subject to God's word.'—*Vindication of the Doctrine that the Mass is Idolatry*, 1550 (Knox's *Works*, III. 41).

(3) *Christ has given to the Church its constitution and officers.* There is no feature in the Church's constitution more vital than this, namely, that it is founded on the belief and confession of the truth regarding Christ; that it consists of those, and those only, who are of the truth; and that, unlike the kingdoms of this world, it can act only by persuasion and admonition, its weapon being only the truth (John xviii. 36–38). This singular constitution, so weak in appearance, in reality so powerful, had for its author Christ Himself. And to Him also is due the appointment of the officers, whether extraordinary or ordinary, by whom the constitution was set up and has been administered. He did not leave it to the disciples to meet after His departure and determine how the Church should be governed and edified. It was

Himself who 'gave, some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers' (Eph. iv. 11).

(4) The authority and rule of Christ as Head of the Church come into view *not only in the original appointment of its constitution and ordinances, but in the lawful administration of these from time to time.* Christ still lives and reigns in God's Sion. The world is sufficiently familiar with the case of corporations whose founders, after drawing up for them a rule, or body of statutes, died and left the administration in other hands. To disregard the will of the founder in such a case may betray unthankfulness, or may be unjust; yet the unfaithful administrators have nothing to fear from his displeasure, for he is dead. With the Church the case is far different. This corporation has a Founder who still lives, and is in a condition to resent disobedience to His rule. 'I am the First and the Last and the Living One; and I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys' (Rev. i. 17, 18). When Christ's people, gathered into Churches, do in that character the work which He has commanded to be done, He will own their deed as if He had done it Himself. When they assemble to worship God according to His word, they may plead His name and authority as their warrant, and no power on earth can forbid them without putting an affront on His dignity. When a Christian congregation takes order for the exercise of discipline on a scandalous person according to Christ's directions, they may without presumption claim to do it in His name; and He has expressly declared that He will own their deed, and give effect to it (Matt. xviii. 15–18; 1 Cor. v. 4). When a congregation calls a young man to be its pastor, and the presbytery, finding him possessed of the qualifications required by Christ's word, ordain him to the holy ministry, his ministrations thereafter possess a certain authority not found in those of a private person. He is Christ's minister. Whoever receives him for Christ's sake, receives Christ. Whoever rejects his scriptural teachings and

admonitions, rejects the teachings and admonitions of Christ. On the other hand, when a Church omits to perform duty commanded by Christ, simply because some earthly authority has interposed its prohibition, that Church is unfaithful to its proper Head, and will have to reckon with Him.

2. Christ is the Head of the Church in respect to **vital influence.**

This also is too plainly taught in Scripture to require formal proof. The Lord's relation to His people is not merely that of a king standing above them, directing them by His word, and annexing the sanction of His authority to that which they do according to His word. He is the Head of the Body, 'from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God' (Col. ii. 19). He is the Vine, and from Him an everflowing tide of life diffuses itself through all the branches. So true is this, that it furnishes a test by which to try ourselves whether we are indeed members of the invisible Church. 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His' (Rom. viii. 9). Where Christ is, there also is the Church. Where Christ is not, neither is the Church there.

This aspect also of Christ's Headship is of vital importance in the doctrine of the Church.

(1) *It explains how the Christian ordinances are made effectual to salvation.* That the ordinances are being made effectual every day to the salvation of souls, is quite certain. They are means of grace. This is true of the word, of the sacraments, of prayer—of all the ordinances. Christ's people know that His saving grace is obtained daily in attendance on these. How is the fact to be accounted for? Among believing Christians no one will say that the saving virtue lies in the ordinances themselves. It is agreed that salvation is by the grace of the Holy Spirit. But what, then, is the relation between the ordinances and this saving grace of the Spirit? Shall we say that our Lord, when He ascended to heaven, left behind Him a fund of spiritual influence at the disposal of the apostles and their successors, to

be by them dispensed to men by means of the ordinances? Such, in substance, is the explanation given by the Ritualists. They maintain the theory of 'sacramental grace.' For example, knowing that Christ has ordained baptism for the remission of sins, they infer that in every case in which a minister duly commissioned baptizes a person in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the person is in baptism forgiven and made a new creature. In like manner, finding that the Lord's Supper was ordained by Christ in order that in it His people might be partakers of His body and blood, they infer that all who receive the sacrament at the hands of a duly commissioned 'priest' are thereby certainly made partakers of Christ. Respecting the efficacy of the *word* to salvation, the advocates of sacramental grace do not care to say much. Their theory is that saving grace is deposited in the Church, and that the regular and ordinary means whereby it is conveyed to men are the sacramental rites as dispensed by the duly commissioned clergy. They who receive the sacraments, as dispensed by lawful priests, receive saving grace. They who do not receive the sacraments as so dispensed, do not receive saving grace. Allowance is made for exceptional cases, but it is maintained that the ordinary ministration of grace follows the rule now described.

This theory, besides being open to other grave objections from Scripture and experience, is liable to this fatal objection, that, according to it, the business of giving to men salvation is taken out of the Saviour's hand, just as if He were dead. But He is not dead. He was dead; but behold He is alive for evermore, and hath the keys (Rev. i. 18). His ascension has not disabled Him from being with His Church still, as truly as He was with the disciples during His earthly ministry. On the contrary, He is exalted a Prince and a Saviour for this very end, that He may give to men repentance and the remission of their sins. He retains this great business in His own hand. He will Himself consider and decide regarding the case of every individual who comes to Him for salvation, or is brought to Him by friends;

and it is not well to leave out of account His good pleasure. No doubt He has promised that, in bestowing the blessing of salvation, He will make much use of the ordinances which He has appointed. It is in the places where He records His name that we may confidently expect Him to come to us and bless us (Ex. xx. 24). But He has not tied His grace to any outward ordinances. He retains the dispensing of grace in His own hand, and would have us deal with Himself about it. The ordinances are designed to help our faith in drawing near to Christ and waiting upon Him. They are abused when men in effect put them in His place, looking to them or their administrators for the blessing, instead of resorting to Him.

Herein, therefore, lies the secret of the saving efficacy which attends the ordinances. They are Christ's, and when they are prayerfully celebrated, He has engaged to be present in the power of His Spirit. Wherever Christ's word is truly preached, He is Himself there, and His power is able and ready to make the word victorious in men's hearts. Wherever the sacraments are ministered according to Christ's appointment, He is Himself there, able and willing to bestow the benefits of which they are the pledges. The business of faith is to see Christ thus present in the Church,—walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks,—to pray for the putting forth of His power, and to hold out the expecting hand.

(2) *Christ furnishes the Church with faithful ministers.* Having suffered for our sins that He might bring us to God, and so gather to Himself a Church, He ascended to the Father and received the promise of the Spirit. Having thus received gifts for men, He proceeded to dispense them. More particularly, He gave to the Church her ministers, some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be pastors and teachers (Eph. iv. 7-11). That is to say, Christ, besides instituting certain sacred offices, raised up fit men to be invested with them. It was He who separated Paul to the apostleship even from his mother's womb, and called him by His grace, and granted him such a revelation

of Himself as might qualify him to bear His name to the Gentiles (Gal. i. 15, 16). In like manner, Timothy and Luke, Epaphras and Archippus, were Christ's gifts to the Church. He raised them up, furnished them with spiritual gifts, moved them to take service, and appointed to each his place and duty. The furnishing of the Church from generation to generation with faithful men is Christ's work, and He keeps it in His own hand. No man may lawfully enter on the ministry unless he is persuaded that he has received a call from Christ Himself. Some famous Churches—notably the Church of England—refuse ordination to any man, however well qualified otherwise, who is not prepared to declare that he believes that he is moved by the Holy Ghost to undertake the ministry.—This has a bearing on the duty of the Church as well as on that of candidates for ordination. Prayer ought to be offered constantly for a succession of faithful men. A Church which thinks it can secure good ministers without taking Christ into account, will find itself mistaken in the end. And when a succession of young men, full of faith and power, are seen offering themselves willingly for Christian service, it is no fancy which sees in these precious sons of Sion the love-gifts of her ascended Lord. Happy is the Church which has her quiver full of such arrows. She shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

(3) Christ being the Church's living Head, *the Church's life and faithful work are truly His.* It must never be forgotten, indeed, that the Lord has chosen to do His work by fallible instruments. The members and ministers of the Church are at the best but men; sometimes they have been bad men. Not seldom, societies professing to be Christian Churches have done the devil's work. Churches, like individuals, have reason to be jealous over themselves, and to watch. Still, the fact remains that there are on earth true Churches of Christ—societies of true believers, who sincerely endeavour to know and to do the Master's will. In these He so dwells that they may say, 'We live: yet not we, but Christ liveth in us.' When the disciples in Damascus were persecuted,

Christ their Head was in them persecuted also ; and He made the persecutor know it, to his cost. It is known to all students of Church history that faith in Christ as their Head, touched with the feeling of their afflictions and their triumphs, has done more than all else to sustain the great preachers and reformers and martyrs in their work and warfare. When Paul and his three companions, in obedience to the heavenly vision, took ship at Troas and passed over into Macedonia, they were made strong by the persuasion that it was Christ Himself who that day, in their persons, set foot on European ground, and began the conquest of the western lands. When Margaret Wilson and the older woman who shared her doom at Wigton were tied to stakes in the rising tide of the Solway, and Margaret, whose stake was the higher, was asked what she thought of her companion, now struggling with death, she replied, 'What do I see but Christ, in one of His members, wrestling there? Think you that we are the sufferers? No ; it is Christ in us.'

II. Before passing from this great doctrine of Christ's Headship, notice must be taken of certain **practical applications** of it, which, besides being of much intrinsic importance, have been the subject of memorable and fruitful discussion.

1. The Headship of Christ has given great assistance in the attempt to define *the limits of the power belonging to the Church.* The long history of the Papacy has taught the world how possible it is to convert Christ's donation of authority to the gospel Church into an instrument of cruel oppression. There are quarters in which one is afraid to mention Church authority or the 'power of the keys,' lest they should suggest a claim to exercise tyrannical dominion over men's faith. It is important, therefore, to observe that the same Headship of Christ which is the source from which all lawful Church authority flows, is at the same time the effectual antidote to all the tyrannical dominion which Church rulers have corruptly asserted. Christ is not a dead or absent Lord, who has delegated His power to some

vicar or body of vicars. He is the Church's living and ever present King; and the power bestowed by Him on the faithful and their officers is strictly ministerial. This most fruitful principle of the ministerial quality of Church power flows directly from the sole lordship of Christ.

The principle applies to the power of the Church in relation at once to Doctrine, Worship, and Discipline.

(1) The Church has authority to teach. Christ having promised the Spirit to lead His people into the whole truth, there is reason to trust not only that they shall be kept from falling into fatal error, but that they shall be led forward from age to age into a more perfect knowledge of the truth, once for all delivered to the saints. Great deference is due therefore to the deliberate judgment of the Church in matters of faith. But authority in this high function belongs to the Church only as *the interpreter of God's written word.* She must be able to adduce warrant of Holy Scripture for every article of her teaching, else it has no claim to be received as the word of God. When the teaching of the Church contradicts or goes beyond the teachings of Christ, it may be rejected with a good conscience.

(2) The Church has power to see that the worship of God is duly celebrated. But here also *her authority is limited to the function of interpreting and giving effect to the directions given by Christ.* Her commission is to make disciples of all nations, and thereafter to 'teach them to observe all things whatsoever Christ commanded' (Matt. xxviii. 20). She has no power to frame new ordinances of worship. She may frame *byelaws* for the decent and orderly celebration of the ordinances once for all appointed by the Lord; but further than that, her commission does not warrant her to go. If a Church presume to lay down laws regarding the service of God which contradict or go beyond the appointments made by Christ in the Scriptures, Christ's people are not bound to obey. On the contrary, it may be their duty to refuse obedience, out of regard to the honour of Christ, the only King and Lawgiver in Sion. The reason annexed to the second

commandment warns us that the practice of introducing into the house of God new ordinances of worship, however plausibly it may shelter itself under the plea that it is a devout attempt to honour Christ by adding new allurements of beauty and grandeur to His worship, involves a presumptuous disparagement of the simplicity of His appointments, and is regarded with jealous displeasure.

(3) The Church has authority to *exercise discipline*. To Church rulers 'the keys of the kingdom of heaven' have been given; they have warrant to open and shut, to bind and loose—to admit into and exclude from communion. But here also their power is limited. Even in civil government the power of rulers is a limited power. The civil magistrate has a divine right to do justice, but he has no 'right divine to govern wrong.' If the power of the sword, although in its own nature *lordly*, is thus limited, much more is the power of the keys, which, as we have seen, is strictly *ministerial*, limited also. When, through the ignorance or malice of those to whom it has fallen to judge his case, a man is unjustly cast out of the communion of the Church, the unrighteous sentence will not be ratified in heaven. In every case there lies open to conscience the right of appeal from the judgment of men to the judgment of God.

2. The sole Headship of Christ is the bulwark of *liberty of conscience*.

Oppression of conscience takes place—(1) When rulers use their power for the purpose of constraining their subjects to act contrary to conscience in matters of faith or morals. It was thus that Pliny, in the beginning of the second century, oppressed the consciences of the Christians of Bithynia, by constraining them to burn incense to the statue of the Emperor; and thus also that the Duke of Alva, fourteen centuries later, oppressed the consciences of the Protestant Netherlanders, by constraining them to bow before the host. If these governors had confined themselves to the use of argument and persuasion, they would still have had something to answer for, but they would not have

been persecutors. But they, in effect, said, 'We are in authority over you. It is no business of yours to judge whether that which you are commanded to do is right or wrong. That is the business of the prince, our master; and you must take his command for your warrant.' Neither the philosophic Roman nor the bigoted Spaniard doubted that a prince was entitled to demand the obedience of his subjects in matters of religion. How was this assertion of dominion over conscience to be met? The modern mind instinctively falls back on the right of private judgment. But that is too weak to suit so dire a necessity. A man is not bound to die in defence of his rights. He may lawfully waive them. It was not the thought of *their own rights*, but the thought of *their duty to Christ* which nerved the martyrs, whether of Bithynia or of the Netherlands, to seal their testimony with their blood. Fearing God, they looked their persecutors in the face and said: 'Christ has commanded us to shun idolatry, and we cannot disobey Him. Our bodies and goods are in your hands to do with them according to your law. But our consciences we dare not subject to your authority. Christ has redeemed us to Himself by the price of His most precious blood, and has forbidden us to be the bond-servants of men (1 Cor. vii. 23).' Thus Christ's dominion has ever proved itself to be the safeguard of His people's liberties.

(2) A subtler form of oppression has been more commonly practised by *Church* rulers. Doctrinal articles have been framed without warrant of Scripture, and the faithful have been commanded to receive them with implicit faith as divine truth; or rites and ceremonies, nowhere appointed by God in His word, have been imposed on the faithful, and conformity to them demanded for conscience' sake. This was the form of oppression against which, especially, the Reformation was a protest. And here also the sole Headship of Christ is the safeguard of liberty. To teach or legislate authoritatively in the Church belongs only to Christ, and the consciences of His people are not to be subject to doctrines or precepts promulgated by any other.

*Observation* 1.—These two topics, **liberty of conscience and the ministerial and limited nature of Church power**, although it is convenient to look at them apart, are really inseparable. The truth regarding them has never been more nobly stated than in the famous passage in the twentieth chapter of the Confession of Faith: 'God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.' This strenuous assertion of liberty is nowise inconsistent with cordial recognition of the power which, as we have seen, has been bestowed on the Church. Liberty and order are not the enemies, but the indispensable handmaids of one another. Accordingly, the Confession of Faith adds these words: 'And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another; they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God.'

*Observation* 2.—This question of Christian liberty has been often discussed, especially in Germany, under the title of the **Universal Christian Priesthood**. The gravest and most pernicious of the errors by which the faith was corrupted under the Papacy was that of attributing a sacerdotal character to the Christian ministry. The clergy claiming to be priests (not *presbyteri* only, but *sacerdotes*), claimed the right to mediate authoritatively between God and His people. Accordingly they demanded implicit faith in whatever they declared to be the truth of God. They required participation, for conscience' sake, in all rites and ceremonies prescribed by them. Above all, they claimed the right to sit in judgment on the consciences of the faithful, to pronounce with authority regarding their penitence or impenitence, and to absolve or refuse absolution accordingly. Not that they claimed to be infallible in their judgments regarding their penitents' state of mind. They admitted the priest's fallibility; nevertheless they claimed that the sentence pronounced by him, being the sentence of a judge, was certain to be ratified in heaven. Whomsoever the priest absolves, God absolves; whomsoever the priest refuses to absolve, to him God's absolution is denied. Such was, and continues to be, the doctrine of the Romish Church and of all sacerdotalists. Luther overthrew it from the foundation, by proclaiming anew the ancient doctrine of the priesthood of all Christians (Ex. xix. 6; 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9, etc.). See the charming

treatise on Christian Liberty, which he dedicated to Pope Leo X. in 1520, entitled, *Von der Freiheit eines Christen-Menschen.* Every believer, since he is a priest, has a right to transact directly with God in Christ about all matters pertaining to salvation. Ministers of religion are to be helpers of their people's knowledge and faith and joy; but all lordship over the conscience, all authoritative intervention, is unlawful. Thus the doctrine of the Universal Christian Priesthood covers nearly the same ground as the doctrine of Christ's Headship. However, for reasons already noted, it is the better plan to give chief prominence, in our thoughts, to the dominion of Christ, rather than to the rights of Christ's people.

3. Christ's sole Headship is the bulwark, likewise, of *the spiritual independence of the Church.*

For reasons which cannot be here explained, the government of the Church, after having been long usurped by the Pope and the Prelates, was very generally suffered at the Reformation to fall into the hand of the Civil Magistrate. In the older Protestant countries it for the most part remains in the hand of the civil magistrate to this day. In the Church of England, for example, the authoritative regulation of ecclesiastical affairs belongs to the Crown exclusively.

This arrangement is quite indefensible. For (*a*) Christ has nowhere given the civil magistrate authority or commission to act in this province; on the contrary, He has put the government of the Church into other hands. 'All authority,' He said, 'is given unto me; go ye therefore, make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all my commands' (Matt. xxviii. 18–20). The charge was delivered to the disciples as such. Having received it, they went forth, made converts, and gathered them into Churches under the oversight of officers chosen from amongst themselves. The ancient commission is still as valid and obligatory as ever. The faithful are bound to gather themselves into Churches, and in their Church capacity to serve Christ according to His word. They are bound to take order that the word be purely preached, that divine worship be purely celebrated, that scandalous persons be subjected to discipline. The responsibility for all this is laid on the body of the faithful themselves, that is

to say, on the Church ; and the Church cannot evade the responsibility by either devolving it on, or suffering it to be usurped by, any other party. (*b*) There is a special impropriety in suffering the government of the Church to fall into the hands of the civil power. For civil power and Church government are, in their very nature, incongruous. The civil power must always, in the last resort, enforce its judgment with the sword, whereas the use of the sword is illegitimate in the Church. When the Church fails to gain an offended brother by persuasion, it can only withdraw from him the right hand of fellowship and leave him to God. When the magistrate fails to gain by persuasion, he must strike with the sword. In a well-governed State the magistrate, no doubt, makes much use of persuasion. When a Christian magistrate is unfortunate enough to be called to give judgment in spiritual causes, he feels extreme reluctance to go beyond persuasion. Judges do not, in these days, like to send a clergyman to jail for using in public worship some rite forbidden by law. But they cannot help themselves, so long as the oversight of spiritual affairs is entrusted to the civil power. The government of the Church by the civil magistrate infallibly tends to obliterate the distinction so earnestly insisted upon by our Lord Himself, between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world.

We hold, then, that the authoritative regulation of the affairs of Christ's house belongs exclusively, under Christ, to the body of the faithful and the officers appointed by them ; that these have an inalienable right to discharge this function ; and that in so doing they cannot warrantably be interfered with by the civil courts. In thus asserting the autonomy or spiritual independence of the Church in her own province, we do not build again the fabric of ecclesiastical tyranny so happily overthrown at the Reformation. We maintain the exclusive right of the magistrate in civil affairs, as strenuously as the exclusive right of Church-rulers in spiritual or ecclesiastical affairs. We condemn the antichristian domination of the Church over the

State, as strongly as the Erastian domination of the State over the Church. We plead for the co-ordinate jurisdiction of the two powers. We desire to give to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to Christ the things that are Christ's.

*Observation.*—The teaching of the Westminster Confession on the questions discussed above, especially the two vexed questions of Liberty of Conscience and the Spiritual Independence of the Church, is a subject of much interest to the Churches which retain the Confession as their Subordinate Standard. It has given rise to a good deal of controversy. Considering that the Confession was drawn up more than two hundred years ago, it is not surprising that, on both topics, statements are made to which exception may fairly be taken. The civil magistrate has functions assigned to him, particularly in chaps. xx. and xxiii., which cannot, without a good deal of pressure, be reconciled with the doctrine of Toleration as now held by all the Protestant Churches. As to the doctrine of the Spiritual Independence of the Church, the Confession in chaps. xxiii. and xxxi. attributes to the civil magistrate so much power in relation to the calling and oversight of ecclesiastical Synods, that the Scottish Church, in the Act in which it adopted the Confession, was constrained to subject its statements on this head to the rider of an authoritative explanation or qualification. (See Act of General Assembly of 1647, printed along with the authorized editions of the Confession in this country.) The teachings of the Confession on the topics in question have been felt so unsatisfactory, that all the Churches which are free to judge and act for themselves have found it necessary either to omit the unsatisfactory definitions (as is done by the Presbyterian Churches of America), or to guard their acceptance of the Confession with an authoritative explanation. In justice to the authors of the Confession, it is right to observe that the exception taken is not so much to the *principles set forth*, as to the way in which the principles are applied in detail. On both of the topics in hand not only does the Confession state the true principle, but it does so in terms of memorable weight and point. '*God alone is Lord of the conscience*'—that is the true principle of Religious Liberty. '*The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of Church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate*'—that is the true principle of Spiritual Independence.

1. *In what sense may a Christian Church be styled a 'Voluntary Association,' and in what sense may it not?*
2. *When and to what effect did John Knox first assert the doctrine of Christ's Headship over the Church?*

3. *When may the office-bearers of the Church claim to act in the name and by the authority of Christ?*
4. *What light does Christ's Headship throw on the fact that ordinances are so often made effectual to salvation?*
5. *In what sense is a faithful ministry the gift of Christ?*
6. *Illustrate Christ's Headship from the story of the Wigton martyrs.*
7. '*It belongeth to Synods* ministerially *to determine controversies of faith*' (*Confession of Faith*, xxxi. 3). *What is the force of the word* ministerially *here?*
8. *Why may not spiritual causes be tried and adjudicated upon by civil courts?*

## CHAPTER III.

### THE CHIEF END OF THE CHURCH.

THE Church's chief end was, not obscurely, indicated by Christ Himself in the intercessory prayer, when He said: 'As Thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world' (John xvii. 18). The Church was instituted by Christ and is maintained in the world, that it may carry forward the business which brought Him into the world. 'The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost' (Luke xix. 10). The paramount concern of the Church ought, in like manner, to be the glory of God in the salvation of souls. In comparison of this, everything else is of secondary importance. Where souls are being turned from sin and brought to God, and built up in holiness and comfort, there the chief end of the Church is being fulfilled. Where no such work goes forward; where men are suffered to live on without God; where there is no living breath of repentance, or faith, or divine life stirring in men's hearts, and no carefulness to abound in good works to the praise of God,—there the chief end of the Church is utterly missed. It is a sight to make angels weep, when men spend their strength in contentions about Church polity and external administration, to the neglect of the one thing which is of supreme and vital importance. The Church which misses its chief end is not likely to be signally successful in ascertaining and fulfilling the will of God in those lesser points. And if it were successful, the achievement would not be worth much in the end. To be ever so sure that we have got the right machinery for doing the Church's

work is a poor achievement, if, all the while, the Church's work is not being done.

The Chief End of the Church, as thus defined, comprehends a variety of particulars. The following claim special notice :—

1. The Church is to be a **Witness for God and His Truth** in the world.

Our blessed Lord, besides promulgating a body of truth or doctrine, instituted a society to be the custodian and teacher of it. 'This appears to have been one reason,' says Bishop Butler, 'why a visible Church was instituted; to be, like a city upon a hill, a standing memorial to the world of the duty which we owe our Maker; to call men continually, both by example and instruction, to attend to it; and, by the form of religion ever before their eyes, remind them of the reality; and to be the repository of the oracles of God' (*Analogy*, II. chap. i.). In other words, the Church was instituted to this end, that it might be 'the pillar and ground (or stay) of the truth' (1 Tim. iii. 15).

This function of the Christian society is the one that is singled out for mention by Christ in the famous passage in Matt. xvi., where the 'Church' is first spoken of by name. Peter had just made his memorable confession of Jesus as the Christ (that is to say, the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy), the Son of the living God; and the Saviour had commended the confession, declaring that Peter had learnt it not from flesh and blood, but from the Father Himself. Thereupon the Lord added: 'I also say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build *my Church*, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.' It is unnecessary to discuss the question whether by *this rock* on which the gospel Church is to be built, we are to understand the *Apostle Peter the confessor*, or *the truth which Peter had confessed*. The latter view is the one favoured by the early Fathers as well as by the Reformers. According to either interpretation, our Lord plainly intimates that the truth about Himself lies at the foundation of the gospel Church. The truth which Peter confessed—the truth that Jesus is the Son of God and the

Messiah of the Old Testament Scriptures—is so fundamental in relation to Christ's Church, that no society which rejects that truth, no society which declines to profess and teach it, is entitled to be regarded as forming part of the Church. So true is it, that the business of bearing witness to Christ and the truth belongs to the chief end of the Church.

The teaching of the apostles is to the same effect. From many passages in his Epistles, we know that the teaching of the Apostle Paul turned mainly on the truth respecting Christ, and particularly on these articles, namely, That He is the Son of God, incarnate of the seed of David; that He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and was buried; and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (See especially Rom. i. 1–4 and 1 Cor. xv. 1–4). Writing to the Corinthians, he not only reminds them how he had been careful to preach to them these articles of truth regarding Christ, and to preach these 'first of all'; but he intimates that, as it was by the preaching of these great articles they had been first gathered, so it was in virtue of their receiving and holding them fast that they were a Church of God, and were being saved. The drift of all this is clear. The Church of Christ is founded on the truth; the bond by which the members are knit together so as to constitute a Church, is the knowledge, belief, and confession of the truth; one principal end for which they are associated in Church fellowship, is that they may conjointly bear witness to the truth; finally, the truth intended in all this is the same of which the Lord Jesus declared before Pontius Pilate that He came into the world to bear witness to it, and which He summed up in the pregnant saying: 'I am the Truth.' The truth on which the Church is built—the truth of which the Church is ordained to be the witness on earth, is 'the truth as it is in Jesus' (Eph. iv. 21).

It is worthy of observation that in the Old Testament, just as in the New, the earliest notice of the Church holds out as its primary function this duty of bearing witness to the truth. It appears to have been in the days of Enos the son of Seth that the godly

were first led to band themselves together as a people distinct from the world. The sacred history records the event in these terms: 'Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord' (Gen. iv. 26). The phrase here translated 'to call upon the name of the Lord,' means more than simply to call upon the Lord (*i.e.* to pray to Him). It includes, besides, the notion of 'proclaiming the name of the Lord' (*i.e.* publicly declaring the truth respecting Him); and in certain texts this latter notion is so clearly predominant, that the translators render accordingly. See Ex. xxxiii. 19, xxxiv. 5. The meaning of the venerable record in Genesis accordingly is this, that in the days of Enos the fearers of God began to hold public assemblies for the worship of God, which worship they presented in such a manner that it was a confession of the Lord's name before the world. Knowing and loving the name of the Lord,—in other words, knowing and loving the Lord as He had been pleased to make Himself known to them,—they were careful not only to call upon Him, but to do this in such a way that the worship they offered was, at the same time, a proclaiming of His name. (Comp. Gen. xii. 8; Ps. cv. 1; 1 Cor. i. 2.)

Seeing, then, that it is a primary and essential function of the Church to confess and hold forth the truth, care ought be taken to make sure that those who are received into Church fellowship are well grounded in the principles of Christian doctrine, and to require from them an explicit confession of their faith. This was the custom of the early Church. The primitive creeds, as is well known, originated in this custom. They exhibit the 'forms of sound words' in which the principles of the doctrine of Christ were set forth in the Churches of the East and the West, the doctrinal formulas which candidates for admission into the full communion of the Church were required to recite, by way of making solemn profession of their faith. The principal articles can be traced to a time so near that of the apostles, and the custom of requiring applicants to recite them as a condition of admission into Church fellowship prevailed so generally among

the early Christians, as to show that some such profession of faith must have been required from the first. It is known, moreover, that during the early centuries great labour and care were expended in giving such instruction in the articles of the creed as would ensure that they should be recited intelligently and not merely by rote. Catechetical instruction—that is to say, systematic instruction in the first principles of Christian doctrine—received constant and honourable prominence in all the Churches.

2. Another principal part of the Church's chief end is the **Mutual Edification of the People of Christ.**

Mankind was formed for society. As it is not good for man that he should be alone, so it is not good for the child of God that he should be without the society of those who have obtained like precious faith with himself. Accordingly, it is the will of Christ that they who have been converted to God by the power of the Spirit should join themselves to the company of the faithful. In the fellowship of the Church, they will enjoy advantages answering to those which a child enjoys under the parental roof, amidst the mutual charities of father and mother, sisters and brothers.

This view of the Church's chief end pervades the Scriptures, and especially the writings of those of the apostles who were the most extensively employed in founding and organizing and training Churches. The faithful are continually reminded that, being the Body of Christ, they are severally members of that body, and therefore are bound to care one for another, considering one another, to provoke unto love and good works (Heb. x. 24). One very good reason much insisted upon to show that Christians should cultivate the society of each other, is that they greatly need one another's help. 'The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee : or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary' (1 Cor. xii. 21, 22, 25. Comp. Rom. xii. 3–8 ; Eph. iv. 7–16). The lesson to be deduced is plain. Christians are bound to live in the fellowship of the

Church, and are not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. This is obligatory out of regard to their own spiritual welfare, as well as out of regard to the honour of Christ. There is no believer on earth so strong that he can afford to spurn the assistance which the communion of other believers is fitted to yield. Times without number, it has happened that obscure disciples, like Ananias of Damascus, have been enabled to render priceless service even to men of shining gifts, like Saul of Tarsus. Many a time a pastor, whose sermons were eagerly listened to by great congregations, has got material assistance to his own faith from the unstudied words of some humble member of his flock, of whose very name the world was ignorant. The eye may be a more honourable member of the body than the hand or the foot; yet it cannot say to either the one or the other, I have no need of thee.

Even were it otherwise, Church fellowship would still be obligatory on all Christ's people. It is not out of regard to their own profit only, that the more gifted Christians are bound to live in communion with their less gifted brethren. All spiritual gifts come from God; and they are bestowed, not to feed the pride of the receiver, or merely to promote his individual and private good, but that, by means of them, he may the better minister to the good of others. The talents which Christ distributes among His servants, whether they be more or fewer—ten, or five, or one—belong still to Christ; the servants are, in respect of them, stewards only; and it is their duty to lay them out so that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ. The rule in regard to them is, accordingly, the one so instructively laid down by the Apostle Peter: 'As every man hath received a gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God' (1 Pet. iv. 10).

It must be admitted that this part of the Church's chief end is often sadly missed. There are Churches in which the communion which the members have with one another can by no means be described as consisting in a perpetual interchange of quickening

and strengthening influences. And no marvel. For there are Churches which are Churches in little more than the name—Churches which are composed, for the most part, of mere formalists. The benefit of the communion of saints cannot reasonably be looked for except among those who are saints. There must first be the brotherly relation before there can be brotherly fellowship, or the pleasant fruits which brotherly fellowship yields. If the members of a congregation are severally strangers to the grace of God, they may no doubt have neighbourly fellowship with each other, but brotherly and Christian fellowship they cannot have. They cannot love as brethren; they cannot consider one another, or edify one another, as brethren. Churches which are so lax in their admission of members, and in their oversight of members after admission, that they become flooded with people in no material respect differing from the world around, are thereby disabled from fulfilling the chief end of the Christian Church. The members are not in a condition to edify one another in faith and love. Accordingly, the history of Christendom abounds with instances in which true believers, not finding in the Church any Christian fellowship worthy of the name, have been constrained to institute private societies for mutual edification, where, in the company of like-minded brethren, they might in some measure enjoy that 'communion of saints' which the Church ought to have afforded. Nevertheless, after all reasonable deductions have been made on account of the shortcomings of the Churches, it remains true that Church fellowship has, in all ages, been a copious fountain of spiritual edification. No psalms have more powerfully commended themselves to the consciences of good men all the world over, as giving just expression to their heartfelt experience, than those which celebrate the amiableness of God's tabernacles, or expatiate on the benefit of the communion of saints, 'how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together' in holy fellowship.

Enough has been said to show that, in resorting to public worship, a desire for personal profit ought not to be our sole object, but ought to be accompanied with a serious consideration of those who are to be our fellow-worshippers, and a fervent desire that the Lord may meet with them also, and bless them, in the sanctuary. It is proper to add, that this fervent desire ought not to be limited to those who constitute the stated congregation. Strangers who may chance to be present should be remembered likewise. In a remarkable passage in First Corinthians (xiv. 24, 25), the Apostle supposes the case of a congregation met for public worship. The exercise in hand is that known as 'prophesying,' that is to say, the Word of God is being set forth instructively and with spiritual power. The door opens, and there comes in one who is a pagan, or at least a stranger to the Christian doctrine. By and by his attention is awakened. It is not merely the preacher's words that touch him; their effect is multiplied tenfold by the sympathy of the faithful, shining forth in the faces of all. The stranger 'is reproved by all, he is judged by all; the secrets of his heart are made manifest,' till at length he falls down on his face and worships God, declaring that God is, of a truth, among these Christians. Plainly, it is no fanciful picture the apostle here draws. He describes what he has seen. Scenes not differing in any essential point are occasionally witnessed still, in congregations where the gospel of God's grace is faithfully preached from the pulpit, and received into loving hearts in the pews. They would be more common than they are, if the members of the Church were more careful to consider their fellow-worshippers, and to stir up in themselves such a living interest in the services of the sanctuary as might be fitted by the blessing of God to kindle a like interest in others also.

3. Another and peculiarly honourable function of the Church is **the Worship of God in Common.**

There is a sense in which the worship of God is co-extensive with the godly man's life. In proportion as we grow in grace we

shall do all things to the glory of God ; a certain devout regard to God will pervade our whole thoughts and feelings and actions, transforming them into spiritual sacrifices. 'I beseech you, brethren' (says the Apostle, Rom. xii. 1), 'by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies (*i.e.* your whole persons) a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.' The words here rendered 'reasonable service' are, in the margin of the Revised Version, rendered 'spiritual worship' They denote that *rational worship*, that *divine service of the mind and heart*, which we, as a spiritual priesthood, ought to be offering continually to our Maker and Redeemer. So true is it, that the life of a truly devout man has an element of worship running through it all.

However, the worship of which we now speak is worship in the stricter and more usual sense. To worship God, in this sense, is to cherish in the heart, and express with voice and gesture, a becoming sense of God's glorious perfections, adoring His power and wisdom, His holiness and love, and rendering to Him grateful thanks for His benefits. We worship God when we, with penitent hearts, confess to Him our sins and beg His forgiveness ; when we, with glad and grateful hearts, commemorate the grace displayed toward us in Jesus Christ—in His birth of a woman, His gracious words and mighty works, His death for our sins, His resurrection from the dead, His exaltation and reign. We worship God when we adoringly trace the steps of His Providence in the ordering of our lives, and in the government of the Church and the world ; and when we spread out before Him in prayer everything which might otherwise breed in us anxiety and fear. Worship of this sort ought to be offered continually by every soul apart ; it is not restricted to public assemblies. But here also the wisdom of God has been careful to call into play the social principle and the sympathy of numbers. It is the will of God that men should offer worship conjointly. One principal end for which the Church has been instituted is that, by means of it, God's people

may be regularly associated in divine service, and may, by their union, fan each other's devotion into a warmer, brighter glow. This is the highest and most honourable of the Church's functions; and is that in which the Church on earth makes its nearest approach to the service in the upper sanctuary, where angels and redeemed men worship God continually.

The intention of divine service, in subordination to the glory of God, is twofold. In the first place, it is meant to yield profit to the worshippers themselves. We confess sin, that our dull consciences may be touched with a keener feeling of our unworthiness. We pray, that we may obtain from the Hearer of prayer the benefits we beg of Him; asking that we may receive, seeking that we may find, knocking that God may open unto us. We celebrate the sacraments, in order that we, and ours, may be moved to call up in remembrance the benefits of which these are the perpetual memorials; and that our faith may be aided in its effort to embrace them and make them our own. It cannot be too diligently borne in mind, that when we draw near to God, it is not to give but to get; not to offer proud thanks, like the Pharisee, but to cast ourselves on the divine mercy, like the publican. As we wait on God, we travel between our own emptiness and the fulness that is in Christ, to the end that we may be replenished with His goodness. In worshipping God, we present ourselves before Him with open hearts, as the flowers open themselves to the summer's sun, that by the virtue of His beams they may become beautiful and fragrant, and may pass forward into fruit.

Divine worship has a further intention. The one just described may be taken in a sense too meanly utilitarian,—in a sense which would condemn, as a waste of ointment, the memorable deed of Mary in breaking her alabaster cruse of precious ointment, and pouring the fragrant oil on the head of her beloved Lord. It is no doubt true that we cannot profit God by any worship we are able to offer. Our spiritual sacrifices are, at the best, unworthy of God's acceptance. Certainly they cannot

avail either to make satisfaction for our sins or to lay up a store of merit in heaven. Lamentable experience has shown how necessary it is to guard against these pernicious errors regarding the intention of divine worship. Yet, on the other hand, it is equally true that the Lord takes pleasure in the worship offered Him by His saints, and that the thought of this is to animate them in drawing near. For, indeed, Christ redeemed them to Himself with His precious blood, to this very end, that they might be to Him a kingdom of priests, and might offer to God spiritual sacrifices (Rev. i. 6 ; 1 Pet. ii. 5). We cannot be profitable to God, yet we may without presumption hope to offer that which will be acceptable to Him. Let it be remembered that God who made us, although He is Lord of heaven and earth, is not indifferent whether we think of Him or forget Him, whether we love or hate Him. He created us in His own likeness that we might be capable of offering Him intelligent and heartfelt worship ; and, as He rejoices in all His works, so He takes special pleasure in the unfeigned homage of the souls He has made. His design in the redemption of the Church is, that His purpose in the creation may at length be fulfilled. Accordingly, He does not despise or reject the love and homage of the humblest of His people. He has given us assurance of this in words so strong that they would have sounded over-bold from any other lips : 'The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty ; He will rejoice over thee with joy ; He will rest in His love ; He will joy over thee with singing' (Zeph. iii. 17). The graces of the Spirit in the hearts of the faithful are weak at the best, and not untainted with sin ; nevertheless, the Lord takes pleasure in them. For they are of His own planting ; they have been implanted by Him at a great cost ; and He sees in them the promise of heavenly glory. The remembrance of this ought to pervade and gladden the whole worship of the Church. When we unite in offering to God our spiritual sacrifices, we ought to open our hearts to the firm hope that He will smell a sweet savour, and that our service will come up before Him as the fragrant incense.

4. Another principal function of the Church is **the Conversion of the Nations to God.**

A great missionary, lately taken from us, used to put this into the form of an aphorism : *Missions the chief end of the Christian Church.* The aphorism has ample warrant of Holy Scripture. The Head of the Church is the highest authority regarding the Church's chief end ; and He gives to Missions the foremost place. He does this, very notably, in the commission solemnly delivered to the disciples before His departure. 'All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations ; baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' This commission appears to have been delivered several times and in different forms ; but never once was its missionary aspect forgotten. (Read, in order, John xx. 21 with Luke xxiv. 47, 48 ; Mark xvi. 15 ; Matt. xxviii. 18, 19 ; Acts i. 8.) Thus the gospel Church was, from the first, ordained to be a missionary society.

In respect to this function, the new dispensation exhibits a great advance on that which went before. The three functions previously noticed were assigned to the Church of God under all the dispensations. Ever since its first appearance in the days of Enos, the Church had been the pillar of the truth ; had been the gathering-place of God's people, where they edified one another in faith and love ; had been the living temple in which the Lord was worshipped with the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise. But till the advent of the Comforter on the day of Pentecost, the Church had received no commission to go forth into all the world, preaching the gospel to every creature, and constraining men everywhere to return to God.

Not that the people of God under the older dispensations were ever warranted to shut themselves up in selfish isolation, forgetting the Gentiles, or looking upon them with scorn and contempt. On the contrary, the Lord vouchsafed to them revelations of His purpose which were fitted to produce a serious, hopeful interest in the Gentiles. At the very time when Abraham and

his posterity were separated to be the covenant society and the depositaries of the oracles of God, intimation was given that the covenant society carried the hopes of the world, and that, after a while, there was to be a reversion of blessing to the Gentiles. In Abraham and his seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. In places without number, the prophets foretold the advent of a golden time, when the law should go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, and all the nations should flow unto the house of the Lord. And evidence is extant to show that these revelations of the divine purpose did not altogether fail to awaken the interest intended. The godly were moved to ruminate on the terms of the covenant with Abraham, and to hail the promised time when all the nations whom the Lord has made shall come and worship before Him (Ps. lxxxvi. 9). Moreover, perceiving that God had entrusted His oracles to them, not for their own instruction merely, but that they might communicate them to the Gentiles when the fulness of time should come, they conjoined the Gentiles with themselves in their prayers for religious revival. They prayed, 'God be merciful to us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us; that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy salvation among all nations' (Ps. lxvii. 1, 2).

It remains true, nevertheless, that, till the mission of the Comforter took place at Pentecost, there was no systematic evangelization of the Gentiles. Even our Lord, in His personal ministry, was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and in His first charge to the Twelve He laid upon them the same restriction (Matt. xv. 24, x. 6). The restriction was not removed till the Spirit was given, and the disciples were endued with power. Then at length they went forth and preached not only in Jerusalem and all Judea, but in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

There is perhaps no part of the Church's duty which has been so much neglected as this. Nineteen centuries have passed since the apostles were sent forth, yet the world is not converted

to God. The Christian historian has to point, with a blush, to whole centuries during which nothing to speak of was done for the conversion of either pagans, or Mahometans, or Jews. Even the Churches of the Reformation suffered the better part of two hundred years to pass, after their great awakening, before they began to lay to heart seriously the lamentable fact that the greater part of the human race were still, as in the age of the apostles, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world; and that an express command of the Saviour was being persistently disobeyed. It was a great and inexcusable omission, which reacted on the Churches with disastrous effect, drying up the fountains of their strength. At length the work so long declined has been taken in hand; all the Churches are bestirring themselves in it less or more; and already Christian communities are being gathered and organized in nearly all the pagan countries.

Much remains yet to be done in the way of awakening the general conscience of Christendom to a sense of the pressing necessity, the magnitude, and the hopefulness of the work. Even of those who remember the missionary enterprise in their gifts and their prayers, how few give to it the place of honour befitting an enterprise which belongs to the chief end of Christ's Church! The Scripture witnesses expressly that the whole world is to be brought into the kingdom of Christ; that the Jews are to be brought back to the faith of Abraham; and that the fulness of the Gentiles is to be brought in. It is the will and purpose of God that these happy effects shall be brought to pass by means of the prayers and labours of the Christian Churches: for 'how shall the nations believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?' (Rom. x. 14). Moreover, there is good reason to believe that the internal prosperity of the Church, at any given time, will largely depend on the measure of her faithful obedience to this part of her Lord's charge. If the Church would enjoy prosperity

—if she would have the Lord to bless her, and make His face to shine upon her, she must labour to make His way known on the earth, and His salvation among all the nations.

1. *What may we gather regarding the Church's chief end—*
   (*a*) *From the earliest mention of the Church in the Old Testament?*
   (*b*) *From the earliest mention of the Church, by name, in the New Testament?*
   (*c*) *From the terms of the commission delivered by Christ after His resurrection?*
2. *What was the design of 'the Apostles' Creed'?*
3. *How are Christ's people to 'consider one another' in public worship?*
4. *When did the Church become a missionary society? Explain the difference between the Old and New Testament in this respect.*
5. *What may we learn regarding the meaning and design of divine worship—*
   (*a*) *From the parable of the Pharisee and the publican?*
   (*b*) *From Mary's alabaster box of ointment?*

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CHRISTIAN ORDINANCES.

HAVING ascertained what the Chief End of the Church is,—what are the purposes for which it was instituted, and for which it is maintained from age to age,—we have next to inquire *by what means this chief end may be best accomplished.* What is the Church to do, in order that the truth of God may be most effectively held forth; that the mutual edification of the members may be best promoted; that they may worship God together most acceptably; and may most prosperously labour to gain the nations for Christ? The Head of the Church has not only assigned to her the work she is to do, but has indicated how the work may be most effectually done. In other words, He has Himself appointed the ordinances in which He is to be worshipped and served.

The Christian ordinances are commonly styled the Means of Grace. They are 'the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption;' and the ordinary means whereby we, on our part, are called to set forward Christ's work. The following are of chief importance, namely, the Word, the Sacraments, Prayer and Praise, the Benediction, Giving of one's substance to the Lord, Ecclesiastical Discipline, and the Sabbath.

## Section I.

### Who may appoint Ordinances.

It will be observed that all the institutions now enumerated have this in common, that they rest upon express warrant of holy Scripture. Our reason for observing them, and expecting that the Holy Spirit will by them communicate to us the benefits of redemption, is not merely that they seem to us to be wisely framed and fitted to be useful, nor merely that they are ancient traditions of the Church, and have been endorsed by the favourable testimony of many generations of Christ's people. Considerations like these have their value. They establish a more or less powerful presumption in favour of any custom in behalf of which they can be truly alleged. But a presumption is not enough in this business. We need a divine warrant; and a divine warrant cannot be established except on the ground of God's written word. This principle is of such great and far-reaching importance that it demands careful consideration before we proceed to treat of the ordinances severally.

The incompetence of human legislation in this province was touched upon in a previous chapter, where it came before us as an inference from the sole headship of Christ. Since Christ is the Church's only head, His word is her only statute-book, and no religious ordinance is entitled to claim observance for conscience' sake unless it is sustained by the authority of the word. We hope to be able to prove that positive warrant of holy Scripture can be adduced for every one of the ordinances we propose to pass in review. It is on this ground alone that we hold ourselves bound in conscience to observe them. The importance of this principle comes out in the circumstance that it is inculcated in the Decalogue itself. If the First Commandment forbids us to give religious worship to any creature, the

Second forbids us to offer our worship in any way not appointed by God in His word. In this matter of worship we are 'not to make to ourselves,' but to keep to the institutions which are of God's making. Nor should the further circumstance be overlooked, that it is in connection with this Second Commandment that the Lord warns us that He is a jealous God. There has always been a strange unwillingness to abide by the ordinances God has appointed, — a strange passion for inventing new ordinances, or garnishing the simplicity of God's ordinances with meretricious ornaments, in the endeavour to make them more awful or more acceptable. The history of the Church of Rome is particularly full of examples of this kind of disobedience. The so-called 'Sacrament of Penance' is an example of the *invention of a new ordinance;* for there is no trace of it in Scripture. As for the kindred error of *corrupting a divinely appointed ordinance*, there is an astounding example of it in the Romish Mass. This claims to be the very ordinance instituted by the Lord Jesus in the guest-chamber before He suffered; yet it is impossible to imagine anything more unlike that simple repast. Besides being mutilated by the withholding of the cup from the people, the service has been so transformed by alterations and additions of all sorts, that a spectator may follow it with close attention, from beginning to end, without being once reminded of the primitive supper and table of the Lord. These are extreme examples; nevertheless they deserve to be laid to heart, as showing how necessary it is to guard against the intrusion of human fancy and human authority into this domain, and as throwing light on the reason of the divine jealousy expressed in the Second Commandment.

The consistency and firmness with which the fathers of the Reformed Churches insisted on the necessity of divine authority for religious ordinances, and rejected such as seemed to them to be devoid of that authority, have impressed on the system of religious worship in those Churches a character of its own, presenting a marked contrast not only to that of the Greek and Roman,

but even to that of the Lutheran and Anglican communions. It must be admitted that the effect has been to make the worship of the Reformed Churches seem bald, to those who have been used to the practice of freely adopting or retaining non-scriptural rites. On the other hand, the stricter system has inestimable countervailing advantages. It is the only barrier that will effectually prevent such an apostasy from the purity of evangelical worship as that which has taken place in the Greek and Roman Churches. What is more and better,—bald as it may seem, it really ministers unspeakable comfort to earnest and thoughtful seekers after God. For what, after all, is our warrant for expecting that when we seek God He will be found of us, and will bless us? It is surely reasonable to think that, other things being equal, that worshipper is most likely to find acceptance who takes God's own word for his directory in worship. The promise on which our faith must rest in this matter runs in these terms: 'In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and I will bless thee' (Ex. xx. 24). Two points relating to the ordinances are here signalized. In the first place, *they are memorials of God.* In the word, in the sacraments, in prayer, in the Sabbath, the Lord's name is recorded. That is to say, the purpose for which they are instituted is to keep God and His revealed will in continual remembrance. In the second place, *God has Himself devised and appointed them* for this end. It would be easy for an ingenious person to add to them a hundred other religious observances which might serve as memorials of the divine name. But God has not encouraged us to exercise our ingenuity in this line. He gives us no promise that He will meet with us and bless us in connection with the observance of ordinances of our own devising. The ordinances He has promised to countenance are those in which He Himself records His name.

This being so, it follows that our comfort is as much concerned as the glory of Christ in our keeping closely to Christ's appointments in this whole business. If a private soldier, having some petition to present to his general, uses the liberty not only to

crave an audience, but to appoint time and place for it, the general may perhaps keep the appointment; but he is more likely to pay no attention to it. If, on the contrary, the appointis made by the general, it is sure to be kept. In like manner, if the Church, desiring to be heard by God, resolves to seek Him in ordinances of her own appointment, He may possibly be found by her; for His tender mercies are very great. But if the Church is careful to inquire what appointments God has Himself made, and to seek Him in conformity with these, she has more than a *possibility* to found her hopes upon. His ordinances are His *trysting-places*. He has bound Himself by express promise to meet those who resort to them in order to find Him, and He will keep His word.

*Observation.*—**The incompetence of human legislation in the matter of religious ordinances.**—The scriptural principles applicable to this subject are laid down in the following passages of the Confession of Faith :—

Chap. xxi. 1 : 'The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture, Deut. xii. 32; Matt. xv. 9; Acts xvii. 25; Matt. iv. 9, 10; Ex. xx. 4–6; Col. ii. 23.'

Chap. xx. 2 : 'God alone is lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience, etc., Col. ii. 20–23; Gal. i. 10, ii. 4, 5, v. 1.'

Chap. i. 6 : 'The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge . . . that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed, 1 Cor. xi. 13, 14, xiv. 26, 40.'

The positions thus laid down embrace three distinct particulars relative to our present subject :—

1. God has jealously reserved to Himself *the right of appointing the ordinances* which are to be observed in His house. The appointing of ordinances belongs to the prerogative of Christ as King in Zion, and His exclusive right in this point ought to be reverently guarded. When men presume to add new ordinances of their own devising to those which have been appointed in God's word, the ordinances thus added are to be rejected. To yield subjection, for conscience' sake, to human appointments in divine worship, may have a show of humility and devotion, but it involves disloyalty to Christ.—This doctrine, held in common by all the Protestant Churches, distinguishes them from the Church of Rome, which, by attributing to tradition co-ordinate authority with holy Scripture, really denies to Christ the sole power of legislation within His own house.

2. The rule which so jealously forbids human legislation in the appointment of ordinances, is held to apply likewise to *the framing of laws designed to regulate the due manner of celebrating divine ordinances.* In reference to this particular, the Protestant Churches are not entirely agreed. The Church of England teaches that 'the Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies,' provided only that what is thus decreed is not 'contrary to God's word written' (Art. xx.). More particularly it declares that 'every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish ceremonies or rites of the Church, ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying' (Art. xxxiv.). These statements, although perhaps capable of a sounder sense (as in Scots Confession, Art. xx.), are commonly and no doubt correctly understood to mean that the Church, in providing for the due celebration of the Christian ordinances, may annex to them and command to be observed, for conscience' sake, rites or ceremonies nowhere prescribed in Scripture. This is well illustrated by the practice of the Anglican Church in administering the sacraments. The Service Book directs that, in Baptism, there shall not only be washing with water as prescribed in Scripture, but also signing with the cross, of which Scripture says nothing. In like manner, it is ordained that every one who communicates in the Lord's Supper shall do so reverently kneeling. In all this, it is maintained, the Church appoints no new ordinance, but simply takes order for the due celebration of the ordinances appointed by Christ. Such is the doctrine and practice common to the Lutheran and English Churches. On the other hand, the Reformed Churches, especially those of the Puritan order, maintain that to annex to the divine ordinances humanly-devised rites, so as to refuse the Lord's ordinances except to those who will

observe the Church's rites, is not only a violation of Christian liberty, but involves the same sort of disloyalty to Christ as the appointment of new ordinances. Taking their stand on the Second Commandment and other kindred texts of Scripture, these Churches teach that God has left the conscience free, not only from such commandments of men as are *contrary* to His word, but also from such as are *beside* His word, in matters pertaining to His worship.

3. Like every other sound principle, this great scriptural article of the Reformed and Puritan Confessions must be applied with discretion. Public worship has much in common with other actions in which men unite. The light of nature and Christian prudence — in other words, 'sanctified common sense' — are men's ordinary guides in the actions of common life; and room is left for the exercise of them in sacred matters also. God has not judged it needful or becoming to set down in Scripture directions as to matters of detail, regarding which good sense and right feeling will suggest everything that is necessary. Nothing could be better than the way in which this is stated in the latter part of the passage cited above from the first chapter of the Confession of Faith.

To judge from the terms in which the Puritan principle is sometimes described, one might imagine that it amounted to this, that nothing whatever is lawful to be done in God's worship or in the government of the Church, unless it is expressly commanded in Scripture; that, in short, there must be 'chapter and verse for everything.' But no intelligent defender of the principle will admit that it shuts us up to a position so inconsistent with common sense. There is no express command to read the Bible as a part of the stated public worship of the Church. God having given us a written revelation of His will, much of it formally addressed to Churches as such, an express command that it be publicly read in the churches was quite unnecessary. Facts are recorded and hints are thrown out, which suggest that the faithful should in their assemblies hear Moses and the prophets, the evangelists and apostles; and in so clear a case no more express warrant is requisite.

There are few things more remarkable in the word of God than the degree in which it abstains from laying down detailed regulations regarding the mode of celebrating divine ordinances. The ordinances themselves are clearly enough enjoined; but regarding the external circumstances which must be arranged one way or another when they are celebrated, there is an almost total silence. Detailed prescriptions, such as those which abound in service books and directories for public worship, are hardly to be found at all in Scripture. Even under the Old Testament the anxious regulation of external details was limited to the

Levitical ritual; the spiritual worship of the Lord was never bound in such shackles. It is worthy of notice that in the New Testament the only instances of detailed prescription occur in the cases of Baptism and the Lord's Supper—the two ritual ordinances of the gospel Church. For reasons not difficult to explain, the mode of their celebration has been somewhat minutely prescribed. The careful way in which the action of the Lord Jesus at the first institution of the Supper is described in 1 Cor. xi. 23–25, shows it to be the will of God that, in observing the ordinance, we should conform closely to the mode of the original celebration. With this partial exception, the gospel Church is left very much to the light of nature and Christian prudence in regard to those innumerable points of detail which must be arranged one way or another, by common consent, to ensure that all things shall be done decently and in order.

The principles now laid down may be illustrated by referring to the teachings of Scripture regarding Public Prayer. The divine warrant for this ordinance is plain. The Lord's house is to be a house of prayer. Moreover, the general rule of the word, which enjoins that God is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, is specially applicable to this ordinance, and is to be carefully kept in view in all arrangements respecting it. But questions like these come up. How many times is prayer to be offered at one diet of worship? To what length ought the prayers to extend? Ought the whole congregation to join audibly? or is it better that one person lead, and the rest follow him with the heart only? In what posture is prayer to be offered—kneeling, sitting, or standing? In what order are the several topics to be introduced? No one of these points is altogether unimportant. The most of them are of such a kind that they must be arranged one way or other, or unseemly confusion will ensue. Yet on none of them does Scripture lay down a rule. The only instance in which a stringent rule is laid down regarding one of the external circumstances of prayer occurs in Matt. vi. 6. According to the rule Christ here lays down, *public* prayer ought always to be *common* prayer. Private prayer is to be offered only in the secret chamber. In regard to all other circumstances of external order, the action of the Church in regard to public prayer is left unhampered by stringent rules. Valuable *suggestions* may be gathered from approved Scripture examples, but stringent rules are not to be found.

This observation might be extended to all the non-ritual ordinances—the preaching of the word, praise, and the like. Regarding them all there is the same remarkable abstinence from minute prescription. The reason is not difficult to discover. The Bible is the statute-book of the *catholic* Church. The ordinances appointed in it are meant to be celebrated in all lands, among all

varieties of men, in all climates, and at all seasons. Care is taken, therefore, not to hamper the Church with regulations which, however suitable in some circumstances, would be unsuitable in others. And the Church ought, in like manner, to abstain from stringent legislation. Regulations of some sort, varied to suit the circumstances of the respective localities, are necessary in order to exclude unseemly confusion ; but these ought to be framed and given forth simply as *bye-laws*—that is to say, arrangements agreed upon, for the sake of convenience, but which are to be understood to be freely alterable, by common consent, whenever circumstances change and they cease to be convenient. Laws, in the proper and strict sense, the Church has no right to frame. The ordinances of Christ's appointment, and the directions delivered by Him respecting the mode of their celebration, —these only are to have the force of laws in Christ's house.

1. *What does the Second Commandment teach regarding the right to appoint ordinances of divine worship?*
2. *How is the worshipper's comfortable hope endangered by admitting humanly-devised ordinances of worship?*
3. *State, and illustrate by examples, the doctrine on this subject—*
   (*a*) *Of the Church of Rome.*
   (*b*) *Of the Church of England.*
   (*c*) *Of the Westminster Confession.*
4. *Why is Scripture so sparing of precepts regulating the external celebration of the ordinances?*
5. *Does it not show a commendable zeal for Christ's honour to deck with new ornaments the simplicity of His ordinances? Indicate the reason of your opinion.*
6. *Does the right of appointing bye-laws involve the possession of proper legislative power?*

## Section II.

### The Word.

By *the Word*, considered as one of the Christian ordinances, we mean, in the first instance, *the gospel of Christ;* that is to say, 'the word of God's grace,' 'the glad tidings of the grace of God' (Acts xx. 24–32). To 'preach the word' (2 Tim. iv. 2), is to proclaim the good tidings of redemption by Christ. The term is occasionally used in Scripture in a larger sense, which will have to be considered by and by; meanwhile it is important to weigh well the stricter sense now stated.

There is mercy in God's heart for sinners. He is willing to pardon them, to make their hearts clean, to receive them into His friendship, and to take them up into His glory; in a word, to save them. It was for this end the Son of God became man, and died, and rose again. Through Him only can the Father's mercy reach us. Now the chief end of the Church is to make known the glad tidings of this salvation; to preach Christ and the forgiveness of sins; to 'testify the gospel of the grace of God;' to do this to all whom her voice can reach,—her own children in the first place, and thereafter all men everywhere. It is a mistake to suppose, as some have strangely done, that the preaching of the gospel, even in this restricted sense, must cease in a community so soon as the community has once heard the truth and been brought over to the Christian name. No doubt there are some proclamations which it is enough to make once for all. But the proclamation of the grace of God is not one of these. There is in the human heart a strange slowness to understand and a strange reluctance to accept the gospel. The evangelical word must be often expounded, and often and warmly pressed on men's acceptance. Nor does the need of this cease even in the case of those who have been moved to believe the gospel. As long

as the faithful are on the earth, they are daily needing the grace of God, and often need to be admonished and encouraged to resort to it. The word of God's grace must therefore be taught in the Church continually.

Hence the supreme importance attributed in Scripture to the preaching of the gospel. It takes precedence of every other function of the ministry. Even the dispensing of the Sacraments is not worthy to be compared with it. It is the gospel that is 'the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth' (Rom. i. 16; comp. 1 Cor. i. 17). The bearing of all this on the work and worship of the Church is obvious. The preaching of the gospel is the queen of all the ordinances; and care ought to be taken to secure to it the pre-eminence. The Reformers did not err when they made the pure preaching of the gospel the principal note by which the true Church may be recognised.

Those who most earnestly hold that the word of God, viewed as the leading Christian ordinance, is, in the first place and pre-eminently, the declaration of God's redemptive purpose, will be the first to acknowledge that the ordinance is not to be restricted to that single topic. The word of God includes not merely the glad tidings of redemption, but *the whole body of Bible truth.* The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, having been all given by inspiration of God, are 'profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work' (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17). Not certain portions only of holy Scripture, or certain lines only of Bible doctrine, are to be venerated as God's word, and taught in the Church. The holy Scriptures are trustworthy and of divine authority in their whole teachings. Accordingly, although some parts are more for edification than others, no part is to be suppressed as if it were not the word of God; and care ought to be taken to have all as fully ministered to the people as possible. As it was the right and duty of the Hebrew Church to 'hear Moses and the prophets,' so it is the right and duty

of all Christian Churches to hear, in addition, Christ and the apostles.

The ministration of the word which is to go forward in the Church is twofold :—

1. **The Word is to be read.** Every one knows how assiduously and systematically this was done in the ancient synagogue. The Law of Moses was divided into sections, one for every Sabbath day in the year, so that the whole law might be read once every year in the audience of the people. Sections of the Prophets were read also. Provision was made in this systematic way for enabling the people to hear Moses and the prophets every year. This public reading of the word of the Lord was the fundamental part of the synagogue service, the central ordinance round which all the rest of the service revolved. We gather from the Acts and Epistles that in this, as in so many other particulars, the worship of the early Church was cast into the mould of the synagogue. The solemn reading of the Scriptures, first of the Old Testament, and then of the apostles and evangelists, so soon as these became available, entered largely into the stated divine service.

That the reading of the word may receive due honour, and may most efficiently promote the edification of the hearers, it is expedient that passages of considerable length be read at once. In the Church of England the custom is to read a connected series of passages from both Testaments, selected by authority, and exhibited in a lectionary. In the other Reformed Churches it has, from the first, been the best approved custom to read not selected passages, but *entire books of Scripture*, the reader beginning on one day where he left off on the preceding day; and also to *conjoin the reading of passages from the Old Testament with the readings from the New*. This custom, although afterwards much neglected, was in use in Scotland from the first days of the Reformation, and was warmly urged by John Knox.

*Observation* 1.—**The Westminster Directory on the public reading of the holy Scripture.**—The Directory premises that 'reading

of the word in the congregation, being part of the public worship of God (wherein we acknowledge our dependence upon Him and subjection to Him), and one means sanctified by Him for the edifying of His people, is to be performed by the pastors and teachers.' It then lays down the following among other directions :—

'All the canonical books of the Old and New Testament (but none of those which are commonly called *Apocrypha*) shall be publicly read in the vulgar tongue, out of the best allowed translation, distinctly, that all may hear and understand.

'How large a portion shall be read at once, is left to the wisdom of the minister; but it is convenient that, ordinarily, one chapter of each Testament be read at every meeting, and sometimes more, where the chapters be short, or the coherence of matter requireth it.

'It is requisite that all the canonical books be read over in order, that the people may be better acquainted with the whole body of the Scriptures; and, ordinarily, where the reading in either Testament endeth on one Lord's day, it is to begin the next.

'We commend also the more frequent reading of such Scriptures as he that readeth shall judge best for edification of his hearers, as the Book of Psalms, and such like. [This is in addition, apparently, to the stated and consecutive readings above provided for.]

'When the minister who readeth shall judge it necessary to expound any part of what is read, let it not be done until the whole chapter or psalm be ended; and regard is always to be had unto the time, that neither preaching nor other ordinances be straitened or rendered tedious. Which rule is to be observed in all other public performances.'

It will be observed that these directions are of the nature of *recommendations by authority* rather than of *stringent rules*. Still, they are of authority in the churches which receive the Directory, and are entitled to more regard than they have commonly received; especially since they are obviously wise and agreeable to Scripture.

*Observation* 2.—**The joining of the Old Testament with the New in the public reading of the Bible.**—This is urged by John Knox in a passage so beautiful and so persuasive that I cannot deny myself the pleasure of quoting it. It occurs in a *Letter of Wholesome Counsel*, addressed by Knox from abroad 'to his brethren in Scotland,' in July 1556. (Works, vol. iv. p. 138.)

'Further, I would, in reading the Scripture, ye should join some books of the Old and some of the New Testament together, as Genesis and one of the Evangelists, Exodus with another, and so forth; ever ending such books as ye begin (as the time will

suffer). For it shall greatly comfort you to hear that harmony and well-tuned song of the Holy Spirit speaking in our fathers from the beginning. It shall confirm you, in these dangerous and perilous days, to behold the face of Christ Jesus' loving spouse and Church, from Abel to Himself, and from Himself to this day, in all ages to be one. Be frequent in the prophets and in the epistles of St. Paul ; for the multitude of matters most comfortable, therein contained, requireth exercise and good memory.'

2. **The Word is to be preached.** That is to say, the truth delivered by God in the holy Scriptures is to be diligently explained to the people, with application to their circumstances, and an endeavour to awaken them to a sense of its import and its claims. More particularly, the good tidings of God's redeeming grace in Christ, and Christ's invitation to men to come to Him that they may find rest to their souls, are to be lovingly unfolded and pressed on all men's acceptance. This teaching and preaching are to go forward in the Church continually. In the 'good confession' regarding His kingdom, delivered by our Lord when He stood before the judgment-seat of Pontius Pilate, He intimated that the kingdom has for its sceptre the Word of God. As the 'bearing witness unto the truth' was that for which Christ came into the world, and by which He founded His kingdom ; so the faithful inculcation of the truth is that by which the kingdom is maintained and extended, whether in individual souls or in the world at large. What the sword is in the State, the tongue of fire is in the Church. The prosperity of the Christian commonwealth depends more on the faithful and unwearied ministering of the word than upon all other ordinances put together.

Preaching may assume various forms. The truth may be very profitably set forth by *expounding a considerable passage of Scripture*. This is the oldest form : for there can be little doubt that preaching, considered as a stated element in public worship, originated in the custom which prevailed almost from the first in the synagogue, of following up the reading of the law and the prophets with some observations by way of explanation and

application. The 'homilies,' so many of which have come down to us from the most famous preachers of the primitive Church, consist for the most part of practical comments upon the sections of the Bible which had just been read, or the psalms which had just been sung, in the congregation. The expository Lecture, while it may be so managed as to be welcome to all, is fitted to be especially useful for building up believers in the truth. Preaching may also take the form of what is commonly called a Sermon, that is to say, a *discourse on some Bible doctrine or on some point of duty*. It is perhaps of more importance to remark that, whatever may have been the form preferred, whether the expository or the topical, or both by turns, it has been the ancient and general custom, in all Christian Churches, to preach *from some Bible text*. The custom is strongly favoured by approved Bible examples. Our Lord's sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth was from a text in Isaiah; Peter's Pentecostal sermon was from the text in Joel setting forth the promise of the Spirit. The custom is a good one, were it for no other reason than this, that it admonishes all parties—preachers and hearers alike—that the Christian sanctuary is not a mere lecture-room for the discussion of all sorts of truth, but the House of God, where His word only is entitled to be heard. The business of the preacher is not to set forth his own opinions or the opinions of his fellow-men, whether these may be well or ill established, shallow or profound; but to minister to the people the word of his Lord and Master. When a man speaks in the Church, he is to speak 'as the oracles of God' (1 Pet. iv. 11).

This divine ordinance of the word requires the open ear as well as the tongue of fire. It is the will of Christ that all belonging to the Church should wait habitually on the public ministry (Heb. x. 24, 25). The benefit of this is strongly put in the oft-quoted statement of the Shorter Catechism, 'The Spirit of God maketh the reading, *but especially the preaching* of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto

salvation' (Quest. 89). This, I say, is strongly put; yet not too strongly. Christian biography and the general history of the Church are replete with facts which prove that the public ministry of the word, in the hands of faithful men, has everywhere and at all times been made largely instrumental in converting sinners, in bringing up the little children of the Church in Christ's nurture and admonition, and in conveying guidance and warning and consolation day by day to the hearts of the faithful. After all that has been achieved in the shape of popular education and the diffusion of books, the great majority of the people continue to depend chiefly on the oral teachings of the pulpit for their growth in Christian knowledge and their vivid realization of unseen things. Nor is the profit limited to the comparatively uninstructed majority. It extends even to those few who, in fulness and ripeness of Christian knowledge, are ahead of the preacher himself, and cannot be expected to learn from his preaching much that they did not know before. It is a most certain fact (account for it as one may) that men deeply read in divinity are seen resorting to the public ministry of God's word with as much avidity, and deriving from it as much profit, as the most illiterate in the congregation. The blessing of God counts for much in a matter like this. So also do brotherly fellowship, and the sympathy of numbers animated with a common hope. Familiar truth, heard again amidst the sanctities of the Christian assembly and the Lord's day, will often come home to the heart with all the force of a new revelation of the mind of God.

1. *Explain the phrase, 'the word of God's grace.'*
2. *What was John Knox's advice regarding the public reading of the word?*
3. *What rule does the Westminster Directory lay down on the subject?*
4. *Why do ministers make it a rule to preach from some text of the Bible?*
5. *Is it only the more ignorant sort of people who may expect to profit by hearing God's word preached?*

## Section III.

### The Sacraments.[1]

In the Larger Catechism a Sacrament is defined to be 'an holy ordinance instituted by Christ in His Church to signify, seal, and exhibit [*i.e.* bestow or apply] unto those that are within the covenant of grace the benefits of His mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another; and to distinguish them from those that are without.' This definition suits our present purpose better than the more familiar one in the Shorter Catechism. The Shorter Catechism, dealing as exclusively as possible with personal religion, confines attention to those aspects of the Sacraments which bear directly on the privilege and duty of the individual believer; whereas the Larger Catechism notices also the aspects which bear on the privilege and duty of believers as members of the Church. Accordingly, the definition just quoted reminds us—(1) That the Sacraments are instituted by Christ in His Church, and are therefore part of the Church's patrimony; (2) that they are badges of the Christian profession, distinguishing the members of the household of faith from them that are without; (3) that they signalize the communion of saints, inasmuch as the mutual love and communion of Christ's people are, by the Sacraments, at once openly declared and inwardly cherished; (4) that they are of the nature of bonds by which we oblige ourselves to obey Christ, and in particular to be serviceable in His house.

[1] The reader will observe that no attempt is made in this place to sketch the whole doctrine of the Sacraments. They are here considered simply in their relation to the Church. For a more comprehensive exposition the reader is referred to an earlier volume of the present series, entitled *The Christian Sacraments*, by James S. Candlish, D.D., Professor of Systematic Theology, Glasgow.

This aspect of the Sacraments is, in its own place, of great interest and importance. These two ordinances present features which must always be perplexing to persons who never look beyond their relation to personal religion, and forget that they are ecclesiastical ordinances. They present features the meaning of which is quite lost unless they are studied in their relation to the Church-standing and Church-life of the believer.

1. This ecclesiastical aspect of the Sacraments explains and justifies the rule, common to all Christian communions, by which *the administration of the Sacraments is entrusted exclusively to ordained ministers of the word.* This rule is not absolutely universal, but it is very nearly so. This is the more remarkable, considering that in hardly any of the Churches is the practice so stringent in regard to public prayer or even in regard to preaching. In most Churches private Christians occasionally conduct public worship. Even in those Presbyterian communions in which 'lay preaching' (as it is called) is or formerly was forbidden, there never was any scruple about admitting to the pulpit candidates for the ministry, licensed to preach as 'probationers.' Now a probationer is not a minister. Some probationers never reach the ministry at all. They neither baptize nor dispense the Lord's Supper. Yet they preach and offer prayer in the Church.

What is the reason for putting such a difference between the Sacraments and the Word? Is it that the dispensing of the Sacraments is in itself an office superior to that of preaching the Word? That is certainly not the doctrine of any Evangelical Church. On the contrary, our Churches hold, with the Apostle Paul, that the preaching of the gospel is an office every way superior to the dispensing of Sacraments; superior for this reason among others, because it is a more potent instrument for conveying grace into men's souls.—Neither is the difference to be explained by attributing to the Churches in question the notion that Sacraments derive their salutary efficacy from the 'orders' of the person who administers them. That notion is expressly repudiated in the Shorter Catechism (Quest. 91). The difference is due to the

simple fact that the Sacraments are Church ordinances. References to the Church-standing and Church-life of those who receive them are so interwoven into their very structure, and enter so vitally into their intention as instituted by Christ, that they cannot with propriety be administered except by the authorized officers of the Church. When a convert to Christianity is baptized, he is thereby formally admitted into the visible Church. There would be a manifest impropriety in suffering this to be done by persons who have not been authorized to act for the Church. The Lord's Supper, in like manner, symbolizes the communion which the members have with one another in Christ —their Church-fellowship, stated or occasional. The administration of it is committed, therefore, to those only who, besides being ministers of the word, are the pastors of the Church. The Sacraments being seals annexed to the word, are not to be separated from the word, and accordingly are not to be administered except by men entitled to preach the word; being, moreover, rites which solemnly declare the Church-standing of those who receive them, they are not to be administered except by men entitled to act in behalf of the Church.

2. The principle now explained underlies also the law of the Presbyterian Church, which requires that, in all ordinary cases, the Sacraments *shall be administered only in the public congregation.* In infant baptism it is not the parents only, but the whole congregation, by whom the little ones are brought to the Lord Jesus that they may be recognised as members of the holy catholic Church, and may receive the seal of the covenant. The meaning of the ordinance is exceedingly obscured when it is administered in the absence of the congregation.—The same is the case with the Lord's Supper. If this Sacrament had been instituted merely to symbolize the fellowship which the individual believer has with the Saviour, it might properly enough have been administered to a single individual and in his own apartment. But that is only one-half of the intention of the ordinance. It is called 'the Communion' because it was instituted to

symbolize also that fellowship which the members of the Church have one with another in Christ. That this part of its design may not be overlooked or forgotten, the Supper ought to be celebrated in the public assembly, and the arrangements ought to be such as to make manifest that it is the act of the Church.

### Baptism.

Baptism denotes the sinner's reception into the household of God. It denotes that operation of divine grace whereby the heirs of salvation are gathered into one body and are all made to drink into one Spirit. Hence the direction in Matt. xxviii. 19, to administer the Sacrament to all converts to the Christian faith. As circumcision was the Sacrament of initiation into the Old Testament Church, so baptism is the Sacrament of initiation into the Church of the New Testament.

Confining our attention to the social or ecclesiastical aspect of the ordinance, it will be necessary to consider its design and the persons to whom it is to be administered.

1. Of its **Design** one part meets the eye at the first glance. It is *a rite of purification.* It thus bears witness that the Church of God is a holy society, and that no man can obtain a place and portion in it unless Christ make him clean. When a convert desires to be admitted into the Christian society, he finds that he can only be admitted by consenting to be baptized with water. The Author of this ordinance is Christ Himself; so that in it Christ in effect says to the applicant, 'Friend, since thou desirest to come into my house, I would have thee know that if I wash thee not thou hast no part with me. Thou hast destroyed thyself, and thy heart is foul. No condemned person can abide with me, nor any one whose heart is unclean. But I died for thy sins, and have made provision for having thee washed from their guilt and stain. If thou art willing and desirous to be thus washed, I make thee welcome to come in.' In this view of it, Baptism

is a visible and tangible memorial of the truth Christ taught to Nicodemus when he said: 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' And it is more than a memorial of truth. The dispensing of it, by Christ's command, to one who professes to repent and believe the gospel is, moreover, a solemn pledge that, if he is casting himself indeed on the mercy of God in Christ, as he professes, the benefits represented in the ordinance shall be still bestowed on him without fail. Nor is this meant to minister comfort merely to the individual who is baptized. It is meant to bear witness to all spectators, and especially to the members of the Church, that there is forgiveness with God, that the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin, and that there is provision made in Christ for such a ministration of the Holy Spirit as shall make foul hearts clean, and fit them for the society of God and Christ and sanctified men.

2. Regarding the **Subjects of baptism**, the only direction given in express terms is, that converts to Christianity are to be baptized (Matt. xxviii. 19). The fact that a man has turned from idols to serve the living God, entitles us to presume that his heart has been touched by the grace of the Spirit. Having received the thing signified, he is not to be denied the comfort of the sign. It was on this principle that Peter acted in baptizing Cornelius and his household. 'Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?' (Acts x. 47). Unbaptized persons desiring to be admitted into the Church, and making a credible profession of faith in Christ, are to be baptized into His name.—Up to this point there is no difficulty.

But the whole matter is not thus settled. In a company of converts applying for admission into Christ's house, there are likely to be some heads of families. How is their case to be treated? Here, for instance, are Lydia, and her neighbour, the keeper of the city prison. Both have been converted. Both are heads of families. They desire to be received into the infant Church of Philippi. What is Christ's direction to them? Shall

we say that it is to this effect: 'Arise and wash away your sins, and come into my house. But you must come in by yourselves. These babes in your arms—you must leave them outside. They cannot believe yet, and so they cannot come in. Those other little ones, by your side—their hearts may perhaps have been touched with the love of God; still, they are not old enough to make a personal profession; and so they too must be left outside. It will be your duty to teach them by and by about Christ, instilling the truth into their opening minds, and to pray for them continually, in the hope that their hearts may be opened to believe as you have done, and that the way may thus be opened for their being received into the Church on the ground of their own profession. For the present, you must leave them where they are, and come in by yourselves.' One may reasonably demand very stringent proofs before accepting this as a fair representation of the sort of welcome Christ offers to parents who come to His door, bringing their children with them. Surely it is more consonant with all that we know about Him to suppose that His welcome will be more ample in its scope, and will breathe a more gracious tone. Surely it would be more like the Good Shepherd to say, 'Come in, and bring your little ones along with you. The youngest needs my salvation. And the youngest is accessible to my salvation. *You* may be unable as yet to deal with them about either sin or salvation; but my gracious power can find its way into their hearts even now. I can impart to them pardon and a new life. From Adam they have inherited sin and death; and I can so unite them to myself that, in me, they shall be heirs of righteousness and life. You may, without misgiving, bring them to me. And the law of my house requires that the same day which witnesses your reception into it by baptism must witness their reception also.'

This view of the matter is sustained by substantial Bible proofs. We can only indicate a few leading points of the argument. (1) It was the law of the Hebrew Church that when a proselyte was received into membership, his children came in

along with him. Not only was he permitted to bring them in; he could not get in without them. The law to this effect is quite clear and explicit. 'When a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it' (Ex. xii. 48). The principle underlying this remarkable law is finely brought out in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, in the examination to which Christian is subjected by the damsels in charge of the House Beautiful, before they will receive him into the house.—The House Beautiful, it will be remembered, denotes the Christian Church, and Christian's admission into the house denotes his reception into Church fellowship.—The first question Charity puts is this, Have you a family? When he replies that he has a wife and four children, he is asked, Why then did you not bring them along with you? He is not received till he has satisfied the vigilant damsel that he has done all he could to persuade his wife and children to come, but they would not. This exactly hits the meaning of the law in Ex. xii. The proselyte who, being a father, wants to come in to the Hebrew Church by himself, is to be roundly informed that his profession of faith in the God of Abraham has a suspicious look. 'If your faith had been of the right kind, it would have moved you to seek admission for your household too. The Lord will not be the God of any man who does not desire Him to be the God of His seed with Him. You cannot be suffered to have communion with us in the Passover till you are circumcised, you and all the males of your house.'

(2) This ancient law regarding the circumcision of the proselyte's household must have been very familiar to men's minds in the age of the apostles; for in every synagogue of the Dispersion there was always a sprinkling of proselytes—Gentiles by birth who, having been converted to the God of Abraham, had been admitted into the synagogue by being circumcised, they and the males of their families. This goes far to account for the fact that full and explicit directions are nowhere given

in the New Testament regarding the proper subjects of baptism. Directions were not given because they were not required, the old directions being still in force. Anyhow, the fact is obvious that the practice of the apostles in administering baptism was exactly conformed to the principle of the ancient law. When a convert happened to be the head of a family, he was baptized, 'he and all his.' Doubtless there would occasionally be converts who had the same sad story to tell that Christian in the *Pilgrim's Progress* tells to Charity. 'My children are not here; for they would not come!' But the rule was that when a man was received into the Church, his household was received along with him. There was no need to lay down a new law to this effect; for the old law was unrepealed. One important alteration, however, was made upon it, as it passed over into the Christian dispensation. Under the Old Testament the believing *father* only could bring in the children. Eunice was a member of the Hebrew Church, but her son grew up beyond its pale. The law did not suffer Timothy to be circumcised till he was old enough to answer for himself. Lydia was more highly favoured. When Paul baptized her, her household was baptized along with her.

(3) The children of a believing parent are not to be accounted unclean, but holy (1 Cor. vii. 14). Not that such children are by nature pure. If they were so, they could not, with propriety, be baptized at all. We wash only that which is unclean. The law which requires that the children of the faithful must be baptized, is an affecting testimony to the truth that they have been born in sin, and that if Christ wash them not they can have no part with Him. The holiness attributed to them is therefore federal, not personal. They are holy in this sense, that they belong to the 'holy nation,' the visible Church. The relation to God thus denoted is a very real one, and is much insisted on in Scripture. In virtue of it, the Lord calls them 'my children,' and He declares that He will hold guilty of sacrilege the parent and the Church who, instead of bringing them up in Christ's nurture, dare to bring them up for the world (Ezek. xvi. 20, 21).

It has already been observed that baptism ought, in all ordinary cases, to be administered in the public congregation. The law of the Presbyterian Church requires this; and it is on every account highly expedient that the law be observed. The profession of faith made in this Sacrament is not made by the parents only (although, no doubt, they are specially interested), but by the whole congregation. There is no ground for putting a difference in this respect between Baptism and the Lord's Supper. When little children, belonging to the congregation, are baptized in the course of public worship, the congregation thereby professes its faith in that invisible ministry of grace which it is the design of the Sacrament to signalize. The action is as much as to say: 'Lord, we humble ourselves in Thy sight, confessing our sins. We are Adam's children, and heirs of the sin which entered into the world through him. Our children also are defiled, as well as we. But we believe that in Christ Jesus our Lord there is salvation for us and them. We believe that there is virtue in the blood of Christ to cleanse from sin. Oh, for the sprinkling of that precious blood! Wash us, we beseech Thee, from our sins. Make our hearts clean within us. Grant, in particular, to these little ones Thy forgiveness and the sanctification of Thy Holy Spirit. Take them, even now in their tender infancy, into the number of Thy true sons and daughters in Christ. Pour out Thy Spirit upon our seed, as Thou hast promised, so that they may grow up as willows by the water-courses, and may serve their generation according to Thy will, before they are gathered to their fathers.'

### The Lord's Supper.

This Sacrament, important as it is in relation to personal religion, has special claims on our attention in connection with the doctrine of the Church. The purposes served by it, in relation to the Church and social religion, are chiefly the following:—

1. It is a solemn memorial and proclamation of the great Redemptive Facts on which the Church is built. As often as we eat the sacramental bread and drink the cup, we 'proclaim the Lord's death till He come' (1 Cor. xi. 26). The ordinance is so framed as to bring into view the death of Christ, with the whole series of events which led up to and followed it; how the Son of God, the eternal Word and Wisdom of the Father, was incarnate of the seed of David to be our Redeemer, and was born in Bethlehem; how He bare our sins in His own body on the tree, and suffered His blood to be shed for the remission of our sins; how He rose from the dead on the third day, according to the Scriptures, ascended into heaven, and entered on His reign, as a Prince and Saviour, to give to men repentance and remission; how He is to come again to complete the salvation of His people and to judge the world. Not only does every individual communicant profess his faith in these great events, but the whole congregation unites in a conjoint proclamation of them, in order that the memory of events so infinitely momentous may be kept alive, and every new generation may be won to the belief of them and be saved.

2. It signalizes the Existence amongst us of Christ's Church, and the truth of Christ's Communion with the Church by the Spirit. We believe that there is a holy catholic Church; that is to say, we believe that Christ's death has not been fruitless; that even at the present time He has on this sin-stained earth a great company of His own people, whom He has gathered to Himself, by His word and Spirit, out of many nations, and kindreds, and tongues. We believe that the life which pervades this great company is derived from Christ; that they are, in a real sense, His members; that they are so truly joined to Him as to have an entire communion with Him in all grace, insomuch that His very body and blood are theirs. We believe that, as the vine nourishes the branches out of its own life, so Christ communicates His life continually to the members of His Church, and thus they live and grow and bring forth fruit to God. The

society of whom these things are affirmed is indeed, to us, in many respects invisible. Christ its Head is invisible to us; as are also the communications which take place between Him and it. These things belong to the domain of faith. But the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ for the purpose of signalizing their existence. It is the visible sign of that great scheme of invisible grace which the articles of belief just recited express. It represents to the eye and confirms to the heart the invisible communications which pass continually between Christ the Head and all those who are members of His mystical body.

3. In the Lord's Supper **the members of the Church acknowledge one another as brethren.** Doubtless the thought uppermost in the mind of the communicant ought to be the remembrance of Christ Himself; the primary concern ought to be to receive Him anew, and to enter anew into covenant with Him. But the communicant who finds room for no other thought is not paying due regard to the Lord's ordinance. For 'the bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ? Seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body; for we all partake of the one bread' (1 Cor. x. 16, 17). The Lord's Supper bears witness respecting the many members as well as the one Head; and admonishes us of the love and service we owe to one another, as well as of the love and service we owe to Him. This view of the matter is strikingly presented to the eye when the ordinance is celebrated in strict conformity to Christ's example. The communicants, when the ordinance is thus celebrated, sit down side by side at a common table, and act according to the Lord's direction to the Twelve when they sat down to eat the Passover with Him, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves' (Luke xxii. 17). Thus, in the act of communicating, the members of the Church mutually express their affectionate regard to one another as members together of the body of Christ, and as brethren and sisters in Christ, and engage to perform the mutual good offices proper to so tender a relation.

Regarding the **Mode of Celebrating** the Lord's Supper, the Bible directions are unusually full. When abuses arose in the Church at Corinth, and the Apostle gave instructions how these were to be reformed, he did this by reminding the Corinthians how the ordinance had been celebrated by the Lord Jesus Himself and the Eleven, on the night of His betrayal. He carefully records the words Christ spoke, and the actions with which they were accompanied; and this he does in such a way as proves that the manner of the first celebration was to regulate the practice of the Church ever after. Regard to the Lord's example, and to the Apostle's use of that example, led the fathers of the Reformed Church to reduce the ritual of the Lord's Supper to the simple order which still prevails amongst us. The leading points in this order are too familiar to need explanation. It will be enough to note the following:—(1) For reasons already indicated, the administration of the Lord's Supper is *always preceded by the preaching of the word.* Thus the connection between God's promise and the seal by which the promise is confirmed is constantly kept in view, and communicants are armed against the inveterate and pernicious error of attributing a kind of magical virtue to the sacrament. (2) We celebrate the Lord's Supper *in both kinds.* In the Church of Rome the cup is withheld from the people. In common with all Protestants, we return in this matter to the original institution, according to which all the communicants partake of the wine as well as of the bread. (3) We *sit together at the Lord's table.* We do not kneel; nor do we require the communicants to partake by receiving the bread and wine, each one for himself direct from the hands of the minister. Here also we return to the original institution; and are the more careful to do this, because departure in this instance has greatly obscured the meaning of the ordinance. It was meant to represent the relation of the faithful, one to another, as members of Christ's family, and their communion with one another as such. (4) We do not think it necessary or expedient to receive the Lord's Supper *fasting.* The Church of Rome and

Ritualists generally lay great stress on this point. It would be deemed an audacious offence for a priest to 'say Mass' (as it is called) after having broken his fast. But this is directly contrary to the original institution. The Lord's Supper was first celebrated immediately after Christ and the Eleven had supped together; and in the apostolic age the Churches not seldom held their assemblies for the breaking of the bread in the evening.

One other topic must be noticed. **For whom is the Lord's Supper intended?** What are the scriptural conditions of communion in it?—This question resolves itself into two—*First*, Who are they whom Christ invites to His table? and, *secondly*, Who are they whom the Church is to admit to it? The former question relates to the duty of the individual communicant; the latter to the duty of the Church.

With regard to the former, the principle laid down in Scripture is very plain. The Lord's Supper is for *the professed disciples of Christ*, the members of His Church, and for no others. He invites to it His friends, *i.e.* all who feel and confess their need of His salvation, who know and believe Him to be the Son of God, crucified for our sins, and who heartily desire to be saved by Him. One who is not, in this sense, a disciple of Christ, is in no condition to eat and drink worthily. The eating and drinking denote such a profession of repentance, of faith in Christ, of love to the brethren, as only a sincere disciple can make honestly. Accordingly, the Apostle directs those who propose to communicate to examine themselves seriously beforehand (1 Cor. xi. 28; and compare Questions 172 and 173 in the Larger Catechism, where this whole topic is opened up with remarkable wisdom). In like manner, it is expedient to arrange that before the communion is dispensed, some words of serious admonition should be spoken for the purpose of touching men's consciences in this matter, and debarring from the Lord's table those who cannot but be aware that they are in no condition to make an honest and cordial profession of faith and repentance and brotherly love.

At the same time, care must be taken not to foster an error on the opposite side. Men are to be taught and admonished that Christ has not left it *optional* to His people whether they shall resort to His table or not. 'Do this in remembrance of me,' is a command as well as an invitation. Many, forgetting this, look upon the Lord's Supper as a kind of luxury of the Christian life, which may be accepted or declined at pleasure. One meets occasionally with professing Christians, who seem to think it actually an evidence of humility to keep back habitually from Christ's table. This is certainly a gross error—dishonouring to Christ, and very mischievous both to the abstainers themselves and those who are under their influence. It is the bounden duty of all who know Christ and would be saved by Him, to use this Sacrament habitually, that they may get their faith strengthened, that they may show that they are not ashamed of Christ, and that they may openly cast in their lot with the people of God.

The other question, *Who are to be admitted to the Lord's table?* will have to be considered more fully in connection with the subject of Church Discipline. For the present, it is enough to observe that the Church is bound, by the law of Christ's house, to keep back from the Lord's Supper—(1) those who are so ignorant of divine truth that they cannot 'discern the Lord's body'—*i.e.* cannot perceive the meaning of the sacramental bread and wine, so as to have their minds exercised about the spiritual things thereby signified; (2) persons living in scandalous sin. These are either not believers at all; or they have wofully forgotten themselves, and need to be roused out of their dangerous torpor. In either case, to suffer them to sit down at the Lord's table would be to encourage them to do that which is fitted to harden their own hearts, and to stain the Christian profession.

1. *Explain the difference between the account given of the Sacraments in the Larger Catechism and that given in the Shorter Catechism.*
2. *The Sacraments become effectual, 'not from any virtue in him that doth administer them.' What is the error here rejected?*

3. *Why is the administration of the Sacraments, in all ordinary cases, entrusted exclusively to ordained ministers?*
4. *What information regarding the Church may be gathered from the Sacrament of Baptism?*
5. *What was the law of the Old Testament Church regarding the admission of Families into membership?*
6. *Compare Lydia's privilege as a mother under the New Testament with Eunice's disability under the Old Testament.*
7. *How ought the whole congregation to take part when its infant children are baptized?*
8. *Illustrate the apologetic value of the Lord's Supper as a historical monument.*
9. *What may be learned from the Lord's Supper regarding the Church?*
10. *Why do communicants in the Lord's Supper sit together at a table?*
11. *What duties are left undone by the believer who habitually abstains from the Lord's Supper?*

## Section IV.

### Prayer, Praise, and the Benediction.

These ordinances differ from the Sacraments in being wholly devoid of the ritual or ceremonial character. They are purely spiritual. One consequence is that, on the principle already explained, the Bible lays down hardly any rules regarding the manner in which they are to be performed. The Bible is indeed everywhere replete with instructions of all kinds regarding them; but these are delivered, for the most part, not in the shape of stringent *rules*, but in the shape of *principles*, which the Church is left to apply from time to time as Christian prudence may direct.

### Prayer.

In public or common prayer—with which alone we are concerned at present—the members composing a Christian congregation unite in offering up their desires to God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of their sins and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies. If proof were needed that the offering of common prayer ought to form part of the stated worship of the Church, it would be enough to refer to the fact that the apostles, in describing their work during those early days of the Church at Jerusalem when they were its stated pastors, sum it up in these two articles—namely, 'Prayer and the ministry of the Word' (Acts vi. 4). This is the principal business of the Christian pastor—to minister God's word to the people, and to offer prayer with them.

The *leading principle* which must always regulate this service is laid down by our Lord in John iv. 24: 'God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.' If

the worshippers are quite ignorant of God, or are mentally asleep, and so do not follow with intelligence the prayers that are offered; or if, while understanding and taking note of what is being said, they fail to lift up their hearts to God for the benefits expressed, —in either case they are not praying in spirit and in truth, and so have no reason to expect that their prayer (if one may call it so) shall be accepted.

*Observation* 1. — **Worship in spirit and truth.** — It would be difficult to name any Bible principle which has been more extensively or grossly violated than that which requires that they who worship the Father shall worship Him in spirit and in truth. Great part of the stated worship of some of the oldest Churches in Christendom has for centuries been utterly corrupted by the evils which the rule was meant to exclude. The following are familiar examples :—(1) *The attributing of special virtue to prayers offered in places of reputed sanctity.* Curiously enough, this error, so widely spread and inveterate throughout great part of Christendom, is the precise error against which our Lord's instruction was primarily directed. Neither Gerizim nor Jerusalem was to be any more deemed holy, in the sense of rendering the prayers offered at them peculiarly acceptable. In the Church of Rome, on the contrary, the people are taught to attribute special sanctity to particular places, and special virtue to the prayers offered at them. Hence (among other evils) the prevalence of the dangerous practice, forbidden in Matt. vi. 6, of resorting to public sanctuaries for private prayer. (2) *The offering of prayer in a language not understood by the people.* In the ancient degenerate Churches of the East and West this evil has been rampant very long. During the apostolic age, and for long after, the whole service, being the free outpouring of the heart, was spoken in the vernacular. After a while, liturgical forms prevailed. When the spoken language of the people underwent a change, no care was taken to make a corresponding change in the language of the liturgies, so as to enable the people to follow them easily and intelligently. Thus it has come to pass that, for many centuries, the public prayers have been said in words wholly unintelligible to the people in whose name they profess to speak. The Romish service-books contain many excellent and thoroughly scriptural forms of prayer; but, so far as the proper ends of Christian worship are concerned, they might just as well have been pagan incantations, for not one word is understood by the people. This, besides being contrary to the general principles of the Bible, is expressly forbidden in 1 Cor. xiv. (3) *The saying of prayers by tale.* The Bible conception of prayer

is asking of God. A man prays for rain when he begs the Lord to send rain. According to the system prevalent in the Church of Rome, a man prays for rain when he recites a given number of *Paternosters* or *Hail-Mary's*, with the intention that the Lord may be thereby moved to send rain. The virtue of the prayers depends essentially on the number of times the form of words is devoutly repeated. It is hardly necessary to point out how totally inconsistent all this is with worship in spirit and in truth. The error is precisely that which our Lord reproved when He said: 'In praying, use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking' (Matt. vi. 7).

The Lord's Prayer is the *special rule* given to direct us in prayer; and the circumstance that it is thrown into the plural form seems to indicate that it was intended particularly to be the directory of the Church in its *public* prayers.

*Observation* 2.—**Liturgies and free prayer.**—Ought the prayers of the Church to be liturgical or free? With certain qualifications, to be noted afterwards, the Protestant Churches, especially those of the Reformed confessions, all except the Church of England, have decided against liturgies and incline to free prayer. This inclination to free prayer has from the first been peculiarly strong in the Presbyterian Churches of the *English-speaking* nations, and the consequence has been that, ever since the middle of the seventeenth century, these Churches have entirely discarded the use of written forms. The reasons which prevailed to bring about this result, and which still carry weight with us, are such as these:—(1) There is no evidence that written forms were used by the apostles or by the Churches under their oversight. The Lord's Prayer is sometimes alleged as an instance in point. And we cheerfully allow that 'the Lord's Prayer is not only for direction, as a pattern according to which we are to make other prayers, but may also be used as a prayer' (*Larger Catechism*, Quest. 187). At the same time, it is well to bear in mind that this remark applies rather to the form which the prayer assumed afterwards, than to the form in which it was originally delivered by Christ, and which is now restored in the Revised Version. The Lord's Prayer, shorn of the doxology, can hardly have been employed as a complete form; indeed, the doxology seems to have been added, after the death of the apostles, in order to make it serve for a complete form. Certainly there is not the faintest trace of the Lord's Prayer having ever been employed as a fixed liturgical form in the Churches of the first century. (2) There is positive evidence that free prayer was in use in the apostolic Church. One precious example of the prayers of that Church is preserved in Acts iv. 23–30; and it was

plainly the production of the moment. Like thousands of the prayers offered every Lord's day in our assemblies, it is the free outpouring of a mind so stored with the very words of holy Scripture, that they come unsought when an endeavour is made to spread out the case of the Church before God. It may be added that Justin Martyr, who wrote in the age almost immediately succeeding that of the apostles, describes the worship of the Christian societies of his time in terms which show that the prayers were free. (3) As for the practice of imposing by law a fixed liturgy so as to leave little or no room for free prayer, it is not only without warrant of Scripture, and contrary to what is known to have been the practice of the apostolical Church, but is in principle illegitimate. It is an unlawful stretch of authority, and an unwarrantable curtailment of the liberties and rights of Christ's people. There are innumerable thoughts and feelings and desires stirred in the hearts of the faithful day by day, by the ever-changing movements of Divine Providence and the continual teachings of the Holy Spirit. These ought to find utterance in the public prayers, which they certainly cannot do when the Church is restricted to an ancient and stereotyped liturgy—'muzzled up (as John Bunyan says) in a form.' A liturgy imposed by authority may, no doubt, be of use in certain Churches as a shield protecting congregations from the coarse and blundering services of an illiterate clergy, or from the still greater evil which might befall them from the services of a clergy unsound in the faith; but such a clergy ought not to be suffered to minister in Christ's house at all.

Up to this point there is entire agreement on the part of all the Presbyterian and Congregationalist Churches. Fixed and obligatory liturgies have never been in use among these Churches, and no one proposes to introduce them. There may be a partial exception in the case of certain Churches, on either side of the Atlantic, which have fallen away into Unitarianism; but it is believed that free prayer is not only universally encouraged, but is, in fact, in general use among all evangelical Presbyterians and Congregationalists everywhere. For the last two hundred years and more the practice of statedly reading from a service book the prayers offered in public worship, may be said to have been unknown in any English-speaking Reformed Church, with the single exception of the Church of England.

It is right to mention that in several quarters there has been of late a disposition to call in question the wisdom of this sweeping rejection of written forms, and to revert to the partial and optional use of them. We say *revert;* for it is to be remembered that a certain partial and optional use of liturgical forms drawn up by public authority was common to all the first Protestant Churches. Certain forms of prayer, and certain other forms to be employed

in administering the Sacraments, celebrating marriage, etc., were drawn up by Calvin and the other fathers of the Reformed Church ; and these obtained so much acceptance that they continue in general use to the present time in the Reformed Churches of Switzerland, France, and Holland, or at least in those of them which still retain State connection. A similar provision was made in the Scottish Church also. The *Book of Common Order*, drawn up by John Knox and the learned English Reformers with whom he was so closely associated for above five years at Frankfort and Geneva, and which was in use in the congregation of the English exiles in the latter city, contained a considerable number of offices which might be employed in public worship. This book Knox brought with him when he bade farewell to the congregation of the English exiles and returned home. When Scotland embraced the Reformation in 1560, the book was adjusted to suit the circumstances of the kingdom. In its new form it was adopted by public authority, and continued to regulate the public worship till it was superseded eighty years afterwards by the Westminster Directory. This does not mean that during those years the ministers of the Scottish Church were required or expected to make use of the prayers in the *Book of Common Order* in leading the devotions of their congregations in the ordinary course of public worship. For, in fact, till the adoption of the Directory in 1645, the relation of ministers to the devotional parts of divine service differed surprisingly from what it has been ever since. The difference was due to two causes. In the first place, there were many parishes in which divine service had to be conducted without a minister at all. As our Reformers acted on the principle that no man who is unable to preach the word ought to be admitted to the ministry, many parishes had to be content with the services of a 'Reader.' As this functionary was required not only to read the Scriptures but to offer the public prayers, he was enjoined to employ for this purpose the forms provided in the *Book of Common Order*. Secondly, even in parishes favoured with a minister, it was customary, for some reason or other, to devolve on a reader the whole introductory part of the ordinary divine service. The minister did not enter the pulpit till the reading of the Scriptures and of the public Prayers was ended, which was about half an hour after the assembling of the congregation. This custom was only abolished by Act of Assembly in 1645.

Facts like these, while they certainly demonstrate that our Reformers were not opposed to all use of written liturgical forms in public worship, prove, at the same time, that they were as far as possible from requiring, or even encouraging, the habitual use of such forms *by ministers of the word*. As illustrating their intention on this point, it is to be noted—(1) that, at certain parts of the ordinary Lord's day service, as conducted by the pastor, free

prayer was *obligatory*, no printed form being provided for those parts; (2) that the use of the prayers in the *Book of Common Order*, by ministers, was only *permissive*. The use of the offices provided for the Sacraments may have been general; certainly the use of the others was not. Knox himself did not make use of the printed prayers, preferring free prayer; and his example was followed by an ever-increasing number, especially of the more warmly evangelical of the ministers. There is no reason, therefore, to allege that the disuse of the printed forms was a reluctant concession to English Puritanism. The truth is, that in this and other respects the Scottish Reformation carried in its authoritative documents the seeds of Puritanism from the first.

The expediency of reverting to the occasional use of liturgical forms is likely to be the subject of much discussion, for some time to come, in all the Presbyterian Churches. In this connection the facts now stated regarding the views and practice of our Reformers deserve, and will no doubt receive, careful attention. Without attempting to weigh in this place the considerations adducible on either side, we offer only one remark. —Something may be said in favour of a return to the optional use of written forms prepared by authority *for such parts of divine service as must always be performed with little variation of phrase;* but as regards the prayers which fall to be offered in the ordinary course of public worship, it is not likely that Churches in which Christian faith is living and warm will consent to go back to the stated use of stereotyped forms.

From the Lord's Prayer, together with innumerable other Bible instructions, we gather that *Intercession* ought to enter largely into the prayers of the Church, and ought to be assigned a prominent place. See 1 Tim. ii. 1–5. More particularly (1) there ought to be much prayer for the Kingdom of God everywhere,—that the name of our Father may be hallowed, that His kingdom may be advanced, that His will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; for the Churches of Christ and their guides, especially for such of the Churches as may be suffering any kind of tribulation for the name of Christ; for all faithful ministers of the word; for the conversion of the Jews, of the Moslems, and of the heathen, as well as of the ungodly who walk in darkness in the midst of Christian light. (2) There ought to be prayer for all Schools and Colleges, that the word of God and Christian piety may so pervade them that they shall serve more and more

as good nurseries for Church and Commonwealth. (3) Intercession is to be made for Kings and all in authority—for the legislature and magistracy, and the whole body of the people. It is of great and growing importance that this intercession should not be limited to our own nation, but should embrace the rulers and people of other nations also, and especially of those nations which are closely related to us by blood or religious profession.

### Praise.

This also is a divine ordinance. It is commanded in Eph. v. 18–20: 'Be filled with the Spirit, speaking one to another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your hearts to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.' In the directions laid down regarding meetings of the brethren for Christian fellowship, in 1 Cor. xiv. 26, it is taken for granted that each one will have 'a psalm,' if he has not 'a revelation, or a tongue, or an interpretation.' These directions, it must be confessed, are rather indefinite; whence we may infer that Churches are left a good deal to their own discretion regarding the way in which the Service of Song in the house of the Lord may be most fitly performed under the Christian dispensation.

There was no need to use urgency in pressing Christ's people to sing praise to God in their assemblies. Of all the priceless gifts with which the Hebrew Church was endowed by the Holy Spirit, and which passed by inheritance to the Christian dispensation, none was more precious than the Book of Psalms; and certainly none was more highly esteemed by the early Christians. The Lord Jesus having thus furnished His Church beforehand with a treasury of spiritual songs, and having, moreover, baptized it with the spirit of adoption, anointing it with the oil of gladness, nothing but a stringent prohibition would have prevented it from breaking forth into joy and singing praise in its assemblies.

Accordingly, we know that the disciples were a psalm-singing community. When Paul and Silas were shut up in the prison at Philippi, they not only prayed, but sang praises to God (Acts xvi. 25); and the circumstance that they did this, at midnight, without book or candle, suggests that they had the Psalms by heart, and were used to the singing of them. The Bithynian Christians who were brought up for trial before Pliny in the age immediately succeeding the apostles, reported that, in their weekly assemblies for social worship, they were accustomed to sing praises to Christ.

At an early date hymns celebrating articulately the leading facts regarding the incarnation and ministry, the sufferings and glory of Christ, began to come into use. But the Psalms never ceased to constitute the Church's principal treasury of song. The place of honour thus given to the Psalms in the primitive Church they everywhere retained in the Reformed Churches of the sixteenth century. No other collection of hymns can compare with them in regard to the depth of feeling they breathe, the variety of experience they unfold, or the authority with which they speak, and in virtue of which they are a pattern by which devout worshippers may, without misgiving, allow their inward exercises to be moulded.

It only remains to add that public psalmody ought to be *congregational*. The music ought never to be so difficult of execution as to disable the congregation from taking part. On the other hand, all who can sing ought to take part, 'both young men and maidens, old men and children;' and those to whom God has imparted any musical gift ought to cultivate it with diligence, so as to be able to sing tunefully. Few things are more unseemly in the sanctuary than to see men and women, Christians by profession, who in pleasure-parties are ready enough to sing secular songs, sitting mute while the congregation is lifting up its voice to God in praise.

### The Benediction.

A Benediction is a kind of prayer. It differs from ordinary prayers chiefly in this respect, that—since 'without controversy the less is blessed of the better' (Heb. vii. 7)—it cannot with propriety be pronounced except by one who is a superior in age or station. Thus Melchizedek blessed Abraham; Jacob blessed his sons before he died; and David blessed his people. Thus also the apostles, in all their epistles, bless the Churches to which they write. And thus, likewise, it has been the custom of all Christian Churches to require that the minister presiding in the public worship should bless the assembled congregation.

The warrant for this custom is found, partly, in the command given to Aaron and his sons to bless the children of Israel in the sanctuary. See Num. vi. 22–27. This might not have furnished sufficient warrant by itself (for ministers of the gospel are not priests), but it is supplemented by two additional considerations. (1) In the Hebrew synagogue it was the duty of the person who presided in the public service, whether he happened to be a priest or not, to bless the people, and to use for the purpose the Aaronic formula, with perhaps some slight verbal alteration. (2) Benedictions not differing in substance from the Aaronic one are (as we have seen) used constantly by the apostles in blessing the Churches.

What, then, is the place and value of the benediction, as a distinct part of the public service of the gospel Church?

1. In the passage just cited from the Levitical law, it is explained that, in pronouncing the benediction, the sons of Aaron '*put the Lord's name on the children of Israel*' (Num. vi. 27). This part of the design comes out even more clearly in the apostolic formula, in the form in which it occurs in 2 Cor. xiii. 14, and is so often employed in our Churches. The parallel between this and the baptismal formula strikes every one, and is significant. As in the baptismal formula there is a public proclama-

tion of the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and the person baptized is baptized into that name; so in the apostolic benediction there takes place the same solemn proclamation, and the same name is put upon the congregation. The relation between God and His redeemed Church, which had been declared and sealed in Baptism, is thus continually reaffirmed in the Benediction.

2. In the public worship of a believing Church, the Benediction is no empty, barren form. In commanding Aaron to bless the children of Israel, the Lord added: 'And I will bless them.' The Benediction, in all its scriptural forms, conjoins with the declaration of the divine name *a declaration of the Lord's mercy and grace towards His people, and of the peace He has prepared for them.* This declaration, since it takes place in a divinely prescribed form of blessing, may well be interpreted as signalizing an invisible ministration of grace, mercy, and peace, going forward continually within the believing Church, whereby light and comfort are shed abroad in the hearts of all true worshippers.

3. Further light on this subject may be got by observing the place which the Aaronic Benediction occupied in the Levitical service. The priest did not come forth and bless the people till he had first offered sacrifice at the altar, and thereafter burnt incense in the Holy Place. We know what that threefold service foreshadowed. Christ our sole Priest, having by His one sacrifice made an end of sin for ever, and having thereafter appeared in the presence of God for us, comes forth in the power of the Holy Spirit into the assembly of His people, and there 'commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore' (Ps. cxxxiii. 3). Considered in this light, the blessing of the people is seen to be indeed a sacerdotal function—the act of a priest; but the Priest who acts in it is seen to be no other than the Lord Jesus Himself. To Him, therefore, the faith of the congregation ought to rise when the benediction is pronounced. In the Benediction, just as in the Lord's Supper, the minister is only the instrument by whom Christ makes Himself heard. As

it is Christ who says : 'Take, eat ; this is my body which is for you ; ' so is it Christ who says : ' The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace.' It is Christ, present in the midst of the Church according to His promise, who truly puts the name of the Lord upon the people and blesses them.

This view of the benediction is very ancient. It appears to have been current among the more thoughtful of the Jewish masters before the time of Christ. It is strikingly indicated in the following rabbinical commentary on Num. vi. 22–27, the passage in which the Aaronic benediction is prescribed.—' At the time when the Holy One (blessed be He) said to Aaron and his sons, Thus shall ye bless, etc., Israel said to the Holy One, Lord of the Universe, Thou tellest the priests to bless us : we want only *Thy* blessing, and to be blessed from *Thy* mouth ; according as it is said, Look from the abode of Thy holiness, from heaven. The Holy One said, Although I commanded the priests to bless you, *I am standing with them and blessing you.*'

1. *What Bible directions about prayer seem as if intended to condemn beforehand certain corrupt usages of the Church of Rome?*
2. *Has any example of a Church prayer come down to us, in Scripture, from the age of the apostles? Give particulars.*
3. *What is our warrant for offering free prayer in the public service of God?*
4. *What was the (Scottish) Book of Common Order? Sketch the history of the book.*
5. *What traces of congregational psalmody are found in the Acts and Epistles?*
6. *Give the exact terms of the Aaronic and apostolic benedictions respectively.*
7. *Describe the threefold intention attributed to the Benediction as a distinct Christian ordinance.*

## Section V.

### Giving to the Lord.

This also is a divine ordinance. We are commanded to honour the Lord with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase; see Ex. xxii. 29; Prov. iii. 9; Mal. iii. 10; Heb. xiii. 16. This ordinance, moreover, has received a larger and more honourable place in the Bible than has ever yet been conceded to it in our books of divinity. When the tabernacle was constructed in the wilderness, the materials were all provided by the voluntary contributions of the congregation (Ex. xxv., xxxv., xxxvi.), and the longest chapter in all the Bible is filled with a document which is virtually a *list of subscribers* to this costly sanctuary (Num. vii.). Passing to the New Testament, we find that, in the Epistles of Paul, the subject of pecuniary contributions to the poor and to the cause of Christ occupies a larger space than any other ecclesiastical topic. Nay, our blessed Lord Himself did not deem it beneath His dignity, or a digression from His proper work, to sit down over against the treasury in the temple and behold how the multitude cast money into the treasury. Whence we may well infer that, when a church-door collection is made for some worthy object, the Lord Jesus will not fail to mark what the several worshippers cast into the treasury, and that He will take pleasure in those gifts, whether they are of gold or of copper, which are fairly proportioned to the donors' ability, and are a worthy expression of interest in the good cause. It is certainly agreeable to the Lord's example when, in arranging the business of His house, a prominent and honourable place is given to its pecuniary affairs. Those who affect to despise the habit of attending to such business, as if it carried a taint of secularity, are in this respect out of sympathy with the mind of Christ. In proportion as a Church is alive

and awake to her duty, there will be occasion and need for much liberality on the part of the members. Three objects, in particular, require to be constantly provided for.

1. **The Sustentation of the Ministry.**—The divine rule on this subject is laid down both by Christ and the apostles. See Luke x. 7 ; 1 Cor. ix. 14 ; Gal. vi. 6. The last of these texts not only enjoins the duty, but indicates the principle which ought to regulate it. It is not said merely that the faithful are to *give* to their minister. They are to *communicate unto him* in all good things ; that is to say, they are to make him a sharer with them in their good things. He and they are partners. At their invitation he has separated himself to the work of the ministry, devoting his strength to sacred studies ; and every week he invites them to share with him in the fruits of these. They, on their part, give themselves to the affairs of this life, and are bound, in fair reciprocity, to make him a sharer with them in their gains.

2. **The Relief of the Poor.**—In proportion as the members of the Church realize the truth that the humblest saint is a member of Christ, and that Christ will take as done to Himself whatever is done to that saint for His sake, they will make conscience of seeing that no brother or sister shall suffer want, if they can prevent it. Where there is a legal provision for the relief of the poor, the need for Church action in this matter is considerably mitigated, especially if Church members of good social standing consent to serve the public in the rather thankless business of administering the parochial poor-rate. Still, the hand of this kind of charity is a cold hand at the best ; and, after the legal guardians of the poor have done their part ever so faithfully, there is much room left for kindly attentions to the godly poor on the part of their brethren in Christ.

3. **The Extension of the Kingdom of Christ.**—All who love the truth are called to be 'fellow-helpers to the truth' (3 John 8). All cannot go forth to preach the word, nor can all help forward the preachers by showing them hospitality in their journeyings.

But now that the Churches have been stirred up to organized effort for the systematic prosecution of missionary work at home and abroad, all can take part in the work by contributing to it of their substance, as well as by sustaining it with their prayers.

Such being the objects for which money is required, *what directions are set forth in Scripture as to the right way of giving it?* They are chiefly these three:—(1) We are *to remember that we have ourselves first received*, and are our Lord's debtors (1 Chron. xxix. 14). Not only do we owe to God all we possess, but we owe to Him our own selves also. This is Paul's argument in urging the Corinthians to liberal giving: 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich' (2 Cor. viii. 9). Due consideration of this will exclude all proud thoughts of merit, and will at the same time keep the stream of bounty ever flowing.—(2) Giving ought to be *systematic*. It is not to be left to blind impulse, but to be gone about with deliberation and as a matter of principle. A Christian is not to give without first taking pains to ascertain what objects are best entitled to his support. One who neglects this may find to his chagrin, that instead of helping forward the truth, he has made himself a partner in the evil work of some enemy of the truth (2 John 11). Moreover, a Christian's giving is to be proportioned to his ability (1 Cor. xvi. 1). The exact proportion is not prescribed. Every man must fix it for himself before God. The circumstance that under the Old Testament one-tenth was required to be devoted to the Lord's service, seems to teach that, under the gospel, the proportion of one's income given to the Lord should, at least, not fall below that fraction.—(3) The direction given to the Corinthians to make *the first day of the week* the day for laying aside the stated contribution to the Lord's cause, may suggest a useful rule for all Christians. This way of connecting our giving with the commemoration of the grace of Him who died and rose again, is fitted both to sanctify and to sustain it.

1. *Repeat the chain of Bible texts which enjoin the giving of one's substance to the Lord.*
2. *Is it right to publish a 'List of Subscribers'?*
3. '*Let him that is taught in the word* communicate *in all good things unto him that teacheth.*' *Give the exact sense.*
4. *What is meant by giving systematically?. and why is this style of giving incumbent?*
5. *What is the surest incentive to liberal giving?*

## Section VI.

### Church Discipline.

Among the first principles of Church order set forth by our Lord in His personal ministry, this is one, That persons living in open sin are not to be suffered to remain in Church fellowship (Matt. xviii. 15–20). If a member of the Church is overtaken in a grave fault, and the thing come to the knowledge of the brethren, it is not to be overlooked. Action must be taken with regard to it; and in this action the first and principal endeavour ought to be, to bring the erring brother to repentance. 'Go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.'

This direction was not altogether new. In its substance, it is as old as the law of Moses. The Israelite was taught that he neglected his duty if he looked with passive unconcern on an erring neighbour. 'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him' (Lev. xix. 17). Some action of the kind thus enjoined is obligatory on us, in relation even to those of our neighbours who may not be our brethren in Church fellowship. In the case of any erring neighbour, we are bound to do what we can to bring him to repentance, and so to deliver at least our own souls. In the case of an erring Church member, we are to go farther. If he will not listen to our private remonstrances, we must take with us one or two more to be witnesses. If this also fail, the matter must be reported to the Church. Indeed, there may be cases in which the fault has been so public and notorious that the preliminary and private remonstrance would be an empty and useless form, and the matter must be reported to the Church at once. If, when it comes before the Church, the offender still refuses to listen to reason, he is to be expelled from the

society. After expulsion, he is to be to the brethren 'as the Gentile and the publican.' The Church, no doubt, ought to keep its eye upon him still, praying for his recovery, and lying in wait for opportunities of dealing with his conscience. But it is not answerable for him any more. He must bear his own burden. He has fallen away into the company of 'them that are without,' and must fare accordingly.

The law thus laid down was not suffered to be a dead letter in the early Church. It was well understood, on all hands, that the Churches gathered by the apostles were societies constituted on the principle that the members were bound mutually to take a fraternal interest in one another's conduct. When the Corinthians suffered an incestuous person to remain in their communion, they brought on themselves Paul's sharp rebuke. The apostle admonished them that sin wilfully tolerated in a Church member will prove a spreading evil; that 'a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.' He directed them, accordingly, to expel the erring member, 'delivering him unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus' (1 Cor. v. 4–6. Comp. 1 Tim. i. 20; Tit. iii. 10; Rev. ii. 14–16, 20–23).

1. The **Design of Church Discipline** has respect to the offender himself—to the other members of the Church—and to 'them that are without.' (*a*) As it respects the offender himself, the intention is, by God's blessing, to awaken him to righteousness and bring him to repentance. Accordingly, the hard formalities of legal procedure should be avoided as much as possible, and an endeavour made to touch the offender's heart by the manifestation of tenderness and brotherly love. (*b*) With regard to the other members of the Church, the intention is to strike into their minds a wholesome dread of sin, in order that the contagion of evil may be arrested and the plague stayed. (*c*) Where open sin is suffered to lift up its head unreproved in the Church, the name and doctrine of Christ are sure to be misjudged and evil spoken of by the unbelieving world. The censures of the Church are intended, and fitted, to correct this evil, and to be an open vindica-

tion of the holiness of the gospel and of the ordinances of Christ.

2. It is of still greater importance to mark carefully the **Object or Ground of Church Discipline.** The civil magistrate, we know, takes cognizance of evil actions considered as *crimes*, *i.e.* as violations of public justice and the good order of society. The minister of the word takes note of evil-doing considered as *sin*, *i.e.* as contrariety to the will of God, the manifestation of enmity against God. The character in which evil-doing comes legitimately under the cognizance of the Church is distinct from both of these. The Church takes cognizance of it neither as crime nor as sin, but as *scandal*. This word 'scandal' is a Greek term of frequent occurrence in the New Testament, and is translated sometimes 'offence,' sometimes 'stumbling-block,' sometimes 'an occasion of falling.' A sin is a 'scandal' when it is such as will be apt to cause those to stumble who come to the knowledge of it. When a conspicuous member of the Church, a man who has openly professed godliness and has been of good reputation among the brethren, is discovered to have been guilty of fraudulent practices in business, the evil is *scandalous;* for other men, whose principles are not firmly rooted, may be tempted to imitate the example of one in so good a position; or the weak in faith may be shaken in mind, as if there was no virtue in the faith of Christ to keep believers from such shameful falling; or outsiders may be led to suppose that Christian godliness is only an affair of frothy sentiment, and a religious profession a mask of hypocrisy. The judicial action of the Church has respect to this view of the matter, and is designed (as we have said) to 'remove the scandal'—in other words, to prevent the sin from being any more a stumbling-block in men's path.

This being the proper object of Church discipline, it follows—(1) That *not every kind of sin is proper to be brought before the Church*. If a sin is absolutely secret, known only to God, it is to be confessed to Him alone. Were the penitent to report such a sin to the Church, the effect would be, not to remove a scandal

but to cause one. It is not sin, viewed simply as against God, that constitutes scandal; but sin, by its notoriety, tempting and offending others, and bringing reproach upon religion. If a sin is so private as to be known only to two or three, it may be the duty of these to deal with their brother about it; but they ought not to publish it. Rash and imprudent conduct here, besides laying an obstacle in the way of gaining the offender, exposes religion unnecessarily to reproach, which may not be easily counteracted, and entails other unhappy consequences. On the same principle, ordinary sins of infirmity, such as cleave to the best of men, are not matter for judicial censure. They are blameworthy; they are to be repented of and fought against; but they are not scandalous.

(2) *Church discipline must take cognizance of poisonous doctrines as well as unrighteous practices.* The truth of Christ is '*sound* doctrine' (1 Tim. i. 10; 2 Tim. i. 13, iv. 3; Tit. i. 9, ii. 1, 8); *i.e.* it is wholesome, bringing health to the mind which lovingly receives it. Opinions contrary to the truth of Christ, on the other hand, are *unsound*, unwholesome, pernicious to the soul. To teach such opinions is certainly to put a stumbling-block in men's way. Accordingly, Christ severely condemns the Churches in Pergamos and Thyatira for suffering false teachers to remain in their fellowship (Rev. ii.).

(3) *The inflicting of censure does not imply that the Church pronounces any judgment regarding the state of the offender's heart before God.* The Church judges not the man, but his deeds (Calvin, *Instit.* IV. xii. 9). There is no ground, therefore, for apprehending that the exclusion of a scandalous person from communion must involve a presumptuous intrusion into the domain of conscience, and a sitting in judgment on a brother's state before God. The Church may do its duty without making any such intrusion. It simply declares that his deed when tried by God's word has been found to be sinful and offensive. So far is Church censure from implying that the offender is judged to be no child of God, that not seldom one reason for

inflicting it is the persuasion that the root of the matter is in him. He is thrust forth into 'the world that lieth in the evil one,' not as a son of perdition,—a man regarding whose salvation the Church has no longer any hope,—but rather with the desire and hope that his 'spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.'

3. A word must be added as to the **Warrant for Church Discipline.** The Church's faithful dealing is apt to be resented. The offending member will sometimes demand: 'By what authority am I called in question? What right have you to interfere between God and me in this fashion? Who empowered any man, or body of men, to hinder me from sitting down at the table of my Lord, because they, forsooth, judge me to have done or spoken something amiss?'

The challenge is best met by pointing to *the fundamental law of the Church*, ordained by Christ Himself, in Matt. xviii. 15–20. The truth is, that Christ does not even leave it optional to the Church whether it shall call an offending brother to account, or leave him to himself. The Church is bound to take action. It must either call him to account, or make itself a partaker in his evil deeds. It is not an unbrotherly act to call a Church member to account for offensive conduct. The unbrotherly thing would be to suffer sin upon him. Every right-hearted person feels how true this is, in ordinary life. In proportion as a company of brothers love one another with a genuine natural affection, they will watch jealously over one another's conduct. It would betray a strange want of natural affection, to be no more concerned about a brother's fault than about the fault of a casual acquaintance. Travellers who happen to be spending a few weeks together in the same inn are not bound to take anxious note of each other's ways. The circumstance that rumour imputes misconduct to one of the guests does not, ordinarily, oblige the rest to probe the matter to the bottom and labour to bring him to a right mind before again sitting down with him at the common table, or permitting him to share in

the conversation that enlivens it. But in a company of brothers, living at home in their mother's house, a very different rule prevails. Here every one is bound to interest himself in the conduct of every other, and will do it just in proportion as brotherly love rules in his heart. Now, the Church is the Father's house, the home of God's sons and daughters; and that man is no true friend of the house who would degrade it to the level of an inn.

As if for the purpose of fortifying the Church's warrant in this matter, the Lord adds to the command to deal faithfully with an erring brother, the solemn promise: 'Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.' When a Christian Church expels a brother because of some grave offence, the act will be ratified in heaven, as if it had been performed by Christ Himself. Our Lord, it is true, does not inform us what the precise effects of such ecclesiastical censures are. One thing, however, is plain; namely, that the power of authoritative discipline is to be distinguished both from the private influence which Christians may and ought to exercise with each other, and from the power which a private religious society has over its members by their mutual agreement. Church censures are to be inflicted by assemblies convened 'in the name of Christ;' and the declaration that He will ratify them in heaven imparts to them a character of gravity which no one who believes in Him will despise.—This does not mean that all Church censures are such as Christ can ratify. If a Church errs in its judgment, condemning a man for that which God's law approves, or imputing to him that of which he is not guilty, the erring sentence will take no effect. And both Scripture and experience admonish Churches that they are not infallible. In their judicial actings they have need to be humble, prayerful, circumspect. Still, they are not to suffer the thought of their unworthiness and their liability to error to take such possession of their minds as to deter them from doing the duty Christ lays

on them. It is with reference to this very matter that He gives the promise: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' His guidance and blessing will not be denied to His servants who keep faithful watch over the purity of His house.

1. *By whom, and in what terms, was the fundamental law on this subject of Church discipline delivered?*
2. *What is a scandal? Distinguish it from a sin and a crime.*
3. *Are Church rulers to judge regarding the state of men's hearts before God?*
4. *What evils result from the neglect of Church discipline?*
5. *What answer is to be given to those who plead that to let offences pass unnoticed is at least the more charitable way?*
6. *Are those only to be expelled from Church fellowship regarding whom there is reason to apprehend that God has finally rejected them?*

## Section VII.

### The Sabbath.[1]

It was the custom of the Churches under the oversight of the apostles, to hold their stated and solemn religious assemblies on the Lord's Day (Acts xx. 7). The custom can be traced back to that memorable first day of the week on which our blessed Lord arose from the dead (John xx. 19, 26). There can be no doubt, therefore, that the religious observance of the first day of the week by the early Christian societies had for its end the joyful commemoration of Christ's resurrection, and that it was grounded on the authority of the apostles and of Christ Himself. In allusion to these two circumstances,—its having been appointed by Christ, and its having been designed to keep Him in perpetual remembrance as the Saviour who died and rose again,—the weekly festival came early to be known among Christians by the title of '*the dominical day*,' 'the day of the Lord Christ' (Rev. i. 10).

*Observation* 1. — '**The Dominical Day.**'—The reader of the Greek New Testament is familiar with the fact (mentioned above at p. 3) that the adjective *Kyriake*, 'dominical,' which occurs only in two texts, is used in the one to designate the holy Supper, and in the other to designate the weekly festival of the Resurrection — the *dominical Supper* and the *dominical Day* (1 Cor. xi. 20; Rev. i. 10). The equivalent phrases employed by our English translators—'the Lord's Supper,' and 'the Lord's day'—have rooted themselves too firmly in the English version to be now removable. Yet it does seem a pity that English readers are not, by some means, apprised of the marked and special way in which the twin ordinances (as they may be called)—the holy

[1] Here again the reader will kindly observe the very restricted intention of the exposition of the Christian ordinances attempted in this chapter. (See footnote at p. 68 above.) The Sabbath is one of the most extensive subjects in theology, but in this place it is considered merely in its relation to the Church.

Table and the Christian Sabbath—are associated with the name of the Lord Jesus, by the very titles which the Spirit of inspiration has bestowed upon them. They are *dominical*, not only in the sense of having been ordained by Christ's authority, but also as being the memorials by which He vouchsafes to record His name in the Church.

The religious Observance of the Lord's Day rests ultimately on a foundation much older than the apostolic age and the resurrection of Christ. It is based on the ancient law of the Sabbath, as ordained at the creation and declared anew at the exodus from Egypt. For it is to be observed that the ancient weekly rest was not instituted merely for the solace of the Individual, the Family, and the Commonwealth, but also to the end that there might be secured to the Congregation of the Saints such respite from toil as might enable the members to come together in assemblies for public worship. The Sabbath was ordained to be the heritage of the Church, as well as the heritage of the nation, of the family, and of the individual sons of toil. Accordingly, under the law of Moses, the Sabbath day was ordained to be observed as a 'day of holy convocation' (Lev. xxiii. 2, 3). Many ages passed before this ordinance yielded its proper fruit; but when at length the Synagogue arose in Israel, and provision was made for holding, in every town and village, stated assemblies of the people for prayer and the reading of the Law, these assemblies were held, as a matter of course, on the Sabbath days. It would have been strange indeed, if a custom which experience had shown to be so profitable to the congregation,—a custom which, moreover, carried in its bosom so much undeveloped capacity for all manner of usefulness in time to come,—had been suffered to drop at the bringing in of the gospel dispensation. In point of fact, the weekly day of holy convocation was not dropped. Rather, it was reinforced and turned to better account than before. In the weekly assembly of the disciples on the Lord's day, what we see is just the Jewish synagogue — the 'holy convocation' of the ancient law—transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week, in order that, in addition to its ancient purpose of calling

men to remember God their Creator, it might serve as the gladsome memorial of the risen Saviour.

*Observation* 2.—**The Lord's Day and the Fourth Commandment.**—The reader will observe that in favour of this great ordinance of the Lord's day—the weekly festival of the Resurrection and the Church's one holy day—we strongly claim express divine appointment as well as divine authority. It has been urged as an objection to this claim, that there is not in the New Testament one text containing either a formal record of the institution of the day or a command to observe it. And we freely admit that the objection is both real and formidable, as against those who decline to base the observance of the Lord's day on the ancient law of the Sabbath, as laid down in the Fourth Commandment. This, as is well known, is the ground taken up by some sincere friends of the Lord's day. They maintain that the Sabbath enjoined in the Fourth Commandment was annulled at the resurrection of Christ; that the Lord's day is a quite different institution, of divine appointment indeed, but the first origin of which dates no farther back than that 'first day of the week' on which Christ was raised from the dead. If this had been the true account of the matter, we certainly should have expected to find on record some statement, by some apostle or by Christ Himself, instituting the day and commanding the faithful to observe it. For it is to be remembered that the observance of the Lord's day is not a matter of slight importance, which might have been sufficiently provided for by a passing suggestion. It ranks among the principal institutions of Christianity. One feels it hard to believe that an institution of such vital necessity to the Church, if it had been quite new, would have been left without any save an indirect and inferential warrant of Scripture. But the objection under review presents no difficulty to us. For we hold that the Lord's day introduced no novelty into the Church. We believe that it was an old ordinance adjusted to suit new circumstances—that it was the ancient Sabbath transferred to the first day of the week, so as to be the memorial of Christ's resurrection as well as of the creation of the heavens and the earth. This being so, nothing seems more natural than that the writers of the New Testament should assume, as known and indisputable, the sanctity of the weekly rest and the obligation lying upon the Church to make it the day for the stated assemblies of the brethren to celebrate the worship of God.

To appreciate the value and importance of the Sabbath to the Christian Church, one has only to recollect the Church's chief end, and observe how every one of the functions included in it is

dependent on the day of rest. Without going into particulars, it may be sufficient to remember that the Church has been instituted for these purposes, among others, namely, that it may be a Home in which believers may live together and edify each other as brethren, and a Society in which they may unite one with another in the worship of God and in doing God's work. How could purposes such as these be accomplished if there were no stated day, fenced off by divine authority and made a day of liberty—a day on which the poorest labouring man may, without blame, lay aside his servile work, may breathe freely, and seek rest for his soul in unhampered converse with God and with God's people? The Lord's day is then best sanctified by the Church when the holy rest which it brings, in its weekly return, is vigilantly guarded against the incursions of servile work and secular cares, and when the Church turns to account the priceless opportunity thus afforded for holding its solemn assemblies, and for putting into operation all its agencies, whether for the edification of its own children, or for the reclamation of the unbelieving world. The loss of the day of rest would be to the Church nothing less than the loss of its right arm.

The following are some suggestions relative to the due sanctification of the Sabbath by the Churches as such:—

1. When Christ's people come together on the Lord's day, *care should be taken to commemorate explicitly the great events of which the day is the appointed memorial.* Men ought to be summoned and assisted to think of God their Maker, and of the nature He bestowed upon them in their creation,—a nature formed after His own likeness, and endowed with immense capacities, either of sin and shame, or of holiness and immortal glory. They ought also, and very especially, to be moved to remember Christ, His incarnation, His death, His resurrection from the dead, and the sending forth of the Comforter.

2. The Lord's day being, by way of eminence, the festival of the resurrection, ought to be made *a day of holy joy.* In the primitive times of the Church there was a law forbidding the

faithful to devote the day to penitential exercises. (Bingham's *Antiquities*, Book XVI. ix. 3.) Not that there was any disposition, on the part of the early Christians, to disparage or to shirk such exercises. Days of fasting were at least sufficiently frequent; but care was taken that some week-day, and not the Lord's day, should be chosen for the purpose. On the same principle, it was thought unbecoming for Christians to *kneel in prayer* on the Lord's day. On other days they might kneel, but on the Lord's day they were to stand erect, in token of joy and victory; and the point was deemed so important that the great Council of Nice (A.D. 325) devoted one of its canons to it. Whatever may be thought about these specific rules, there can be no doubt that the feeling which dictated them was a just and scriptural one. God's Israel are to call the Sabbath 'a delight' and 'honourable' (Isa. lviii. 13). While the incursions of secularity are to be repelled, care should be taken to manage the sanctification of the day in such a manner that the youngest may never be led to regard it as a day of mere restraint.

3. The Lord's day is *not* duly observed by the Church *unless the members who belong to the class of the labouring poor are diligently remembered, and care is taken to secure to them their share in the general rest.* The Sabbath was, from the beginning, the poor man's day (Deut. v. 14, 15); and surely the resurrection of Christ has made it more the poor man's day than ever. Christ will take no pleasure in the worship offered Him by men who bind the yoke on others, while they themselves enjoy the weekly respite from toil. The Church's Sabbaths are most likely to please the Lord when she labours most diligently to secure that they shall be Sabbaths indeed—days of liberty—to the humblest of His members.

1. *What is there in the chief end of the Church that renders some such institution as the Sabbath indispensable?*
2. *Mention and explain the new designation given to the Christian Sabbath in the apostolic Scriptures.*

3. *Trace in the New Testament the religious observance of the Lord's day, from the beginning to the end of the apostolic age.*
4. *Was the assembling of God's people for public worship on a weekly Sabbath a new custom in the Church of God when the apostles began to plant Churches? Explain how the matter stood.*
5. *How do you account for the fact that the New Testament contains no command to keep holy the Lord's day?*
6. *What class in the community ought to be specially considered on the Lord's day?*
7. *What was the feeling of the primitive Church as to the fittest manner of sanctifying the Lord's day? and what countenance does the Bible give to it?*

## CHAPTER V.

### THE POLITY OF THE CHURCH.

On this subject Christ's people are more widely, or at least more conspicuously, divided in opinion than on any other connected with the Church. Besides innumerable subdivisions, three distinct forms of polity everywhere confront each other: the Episcopalian or Prelatic, the Presbyterian, and the Congregationalist. Moreover, there are certain religious bodies, such as the Society of Friends and the Plymouth Brethren, who may be said to reject regular government altogether. The unhappy peculiarity of differences on this head is, that they admit neither of concealment nor compromise. A Church must be either organized or not organized. It cannot be both at once. And in organizing a Church you must proceed on some plan. A Church cannot be at once Presbyterian, Prelatic, and Congregationalist. One consequence is, that this topic of Church polity, since it does not admit of compromise, is apt to be deemed the matter of paramount importance in relation to the Christian Church. Since it demands to be settled one way or another before men can act together in Church fellowship, people are apt to suppose that it must be a vital article, if not in Christianity, at least in the social or Church life of the faithful. Yet this would certainly be a mistake. Not only has good Christian work of a general kind been done by Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians indiscriminately, it is certain that genuine *Church* work —the sort of work proper to the Christian society as such—has been done in connection with all the three forms of polity. And

surely the essential thing is that the Church's work should be done somehow. One way of doing it may be more scriptural, more effective, and, on every account, better than another; nevertheless, the question as to the best way of doing the work is obviously of less importance than the work itself. It is for this reason that we have been careful to give the foremost place to the subject of the Church's Chief End,—the Church's appointed work, — and have reserved to the last place the question of the divinely-ordained Polity of the Church. The spires and roofs of a city may be the first things to arrest the traveller's attention, and may contribute most to please or offend his eye; nevertheless they are by no means the things of chief importance for the health and convenience of the inhabitants.

We have said that the forms of polity which have obtained chief acceptance, and between which men must make their choice, are three in number. It will pave the way for further progress if we pass these in review, and mark the features by which they are respectively distinguished.

### 1. Presbytery.

The characteristic features of this polity are the following:— (*a*) In every congregation the stated oversight of affairs is entrusted to officers chosen by the people from among themselves. These are of two sorts—namely, elders and deacons. The business of the Elders is to take the spiritual oversight of the flock—watching over the life and conduct of the members, and seeing that Christian ordinances are duly administered. The Deacons attend to the 'outward business of the house of God,' particularly the management of the moneys and buildings, and the ministering to the poor; and they are associated with the elders for this purpose. Thus, according to the Presbyterian system, *every congregation or local Church is a corporation capable of managing its affairs by means of representatives*

*chosen for the purpose out of its own membership.* (*b*) There is *in every congregation a pastor*,—one at least,—who is also an elder, but whose special duty is to minister the word and sacraments. This pastor or teaching elder is the officer of highest rank in the Presbyterian system. (*c*) In all cases in which the arrangement is possible, *neighbouring congregations are associated under a common government.* This is arranged according to the representative principle — ministers and ruling elders commissioned from the congregations of the neighbourhood constituting the 'Presbytery of the bounds,' or the 'Provincial Synod,' or the 'General Assembly,' as the case may be; and these several judicatories or councils are charged with the oversight of the affairs common to all the congregations represented in them. The number of congregations, or local Churches, proper to be thus associated in one ecclesiastical body is left to be determined by considerations of convenience. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America embraces several thousands of Churches scattered over a vast continent. The famous Church of Geneva—also a Presbyterian Church—embraced only the inhabitants of a small city.

Next to its conformity to Scripture, the boast of this system is that it combines, more perfectly than any other, a jealous solicitude for the liberty of the Christian people, with a due regard to the interests of effective and orderly government. It is a fine example of popular government, tempered and guided by the official teachings of an educated ministry, and so organized, with a gradation of representative assemblies, as to provide for the union of many particular Churches in one ecclesiastical fellowship.

### 2. Congregationalism.

This polity is near of kin to the Presbyterian. The differences between them relate principally to two points. (*a*) According to the Congregationalist theory, *the local Church is such a company*

*of professing Christians as may hold its ordinary assemblies for worship in one place.* This theory, first promulgated by the English 'Independents' in the beginning of the seventeenth century, is still chiefly maintained by their descendants in this country and New England. It is thus stated by Mr. Dexter, an American writer, who may be taken as representing the New England Churches: 'A Church, as a rule, should include only those who can conveniently worship and labour together, and watch over each other' (*Congregationalism*, Boston 1876, p. 34. Comp. Owen's Works, xv. 262). (*b*) Congregationalists, for the most part, *reject the ruling eldership.* They hold that the official oversight of the flock belongs exclusively to the pastor or pastors. The business of receiving into and excluding from Church membership, which among Presbyterians is devolved on the Church-session, belongs among Congregationalists to the total membership. Interpreting very literally our Lord's direction, 'Tell it unto the Church,' the Congregationalists believe that the exercise of discipline upon an erring brother must be performed by the Church, in a general meeting of the members.

It is right to add that this account of Congregationalism does not hold true of all the Congregationalist Churches. For, in the first place, the ruling eldership has had nowhere more strenuous advocates than among the fathers of English Independency. Dr. William Ames and Dr. John Owen are illustrious examples, belonging to the former half of the seventeenth century. They maintained the scriptural authority of the Ruling Eldership more strongly than most of their Presbyterian contemporaries in England. In our own time also, the Baptist Church in London, under the pastorate of Mr. Spurgeon, is a signal example of a Church which, although Congregationalist in polity, is governed by a consistory of elders, associated with the pastor for the purpose. In the second place, the Congregationalists of New England, while still maintaining that every organized congregation is a complete Church, lay emphasis on the duty of mutual

fellowship among neighbouring Churches, to a degree which approximates very closely to the Presbyterian system. Some of them go so far as to object to be called Independents on this very account. 'Between neighbouring Churches (writes Mr. Dexter, pp. 1, 2), Congregationalism recognises a fraternal and equal fellowship, which invests each with the right and duty of advice and reproof, and even of the public withdrawal of that fellowship, in case the course pursued by another of the sisterhood should demand such action for the preservation of its own purity and consistency. Herein (he adds) Congregationalism, as a system, differs from Independency.' In accordance with this principle, it is customary in New England to convene a council, consisting of pastors and other deputies from the neighbouring Churches, to take part in the settlement or translation of pastors, in the healing of divisions, in the solution of difficult questions, and the like, very much as is done by the Presbytery of the bounds among us. These councils, to be sure, disclaim all authority, and profess to act only by way of advice; but advice which is enforced with the threat of cutting off from fellowship does not differ, in any material respect, from the sort of authoritative judgments which are pronounced by Presbyterian judicatories.

Congregationalists are accustomed to add, as a third feature distinctive of their polity, that according to it the power which Christ has bestowed on His Church has its seat, not in any ruling class, but in the whole body of the people. But they are mistaken in thinking that this doctrine regarding *the seat of Church power* is peculiar to them. The only thing really peculiar to Congregationalists in relation to this matter is their way of devolving the exercise of Church power on the 'Church meeting.' It would, we admit, be easy to point to Presbyterians of good name who teach that Church power resides ultimately, under Christ, in the order of *Presbyters;* just as the great majority of Episcopalians think it resides in the order of *Prelates*. But the contrary principle, which makes *the body of the faithful* the

ultimate depositary of Church power, under Christ, besides being maintained by distinguished Episcopalians, like the late Archbishop Whately, has all along found pretty general acceptance among Presbyterians. It was much insisted on by Luther and Melanchthon; for, in truth, it forms part of the great Reformation doctrine of the Universal Christian Priesthood. What is of more importance to us, in this country, the principle has found a place in the constitution of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, from John Knox downwards.

### 3. Prelacy.

According to this polity, the right to rule in the Church belongs to one officer only, and to him the Bible term *bishop* is appropriated. The diocese of the bishop may embrace only one congregation, or it may (and commonly does) embrace many congregations, with perhaps myriads of members; nevertheless the exercise of rule within the diocese belongs exclusively to him. To the bishop alone it belongs to admit into Church fellowship, for he alone may administer 'confirmation.' On him devolves the duty of trying scandalous persons, and excluding them from fellowship. Above all, the conferring of 'holy orders' belongs entirely and exclusively to his prerogative. The honours and duties which, in the Presbyterian polity, devolve on the assembly of presbyters, belong in the Prelatic polity to the single person of the bishop. The rule among Presbyterians is that every Church is governed by a plurality of elders; the rule among Episcopalians is that a plurality of Churches is always governed by a single bishop.

It is important to observe that the Prelatic or Episcopalian polity now described is maintained in two very different senses. There are Moderate Episcopalians, and there are also extreme or High-Church Episcopalians; and these two classes are separated from each other by a chasm far deeper and wider than that which separates the Moderate Episcopalian from his Presbyterian or Congregationalist neighbour.

The more *Moderate adherents of Prelacy* argue for it mainly on the ground of expediency and ancient tradition. They think it is a convenient arrangement that the congregations of a province or diocese, together with their clergy, should be placed under the oversight of one man of learning, piety, approved wisdom, and administrative ability, who may devote to it his undivided attention. Their favourable opinion is much strengthened by the fact that this Prelatic form of government, beginning so early as the second century, was universally prevalent in the Church for more than a thousand years, and continues still to prevail throughout the greater part of Christendom. To an institution so ancient and generally received they cling with reverence. At the same time they refuse to join in the cry of their High-Church brethren: 'No bishop, no Church!' While deeming Episcopacy on the whole the best polity, they by no means deem it the only legitimate polity. They admit that there may very well be a true Church without a bishop. This, it ought to be observed, was the judgment expressed and acted upon by the leaders of the English Reformation. Cranmer and his brethren cordially gave the right hand of fellowship to the Reformed Churches of France and Switzerland, of Holland and Scotland, although these were strictly Presbyterian in government. The same just and liberal sentiment is still professed by leading Episcopalians. Not a few of the most learned and able divines of the Church of England, in our age, freely admit that, in the New Testament, *bishop* and *elder* (or *presbyter*) are convertible terms, and that the only regular officers in the Churches addressed in the Pauline Epistles were the presbyter-bishops and the deacons.

The *Extreme or High-Church Prelatists* take up very different ground. According to them, there can be no Church at all without a lord-bishop. They hold that all Church authority was committed by Christ to the Twelve; and that, accordingly, Christian ordinances could not be validly administered except either by the Twelve, or by such as they ordained and commissioned. They hold that by Christ's command the authority

thus bestowed on the Twelve was transmitted by them to the bishops—an order of clergy superior to both deacons and presbyters; and that the bishops alone were entitled to exercise spiritual government in their respective dioceses. It follows, therefore, that no man is entitled, before God, to preach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he has been episcopally ordained; and no one but a bishop may either receive into Church fellowship (by confirmation) or exclude from it (by excommunication). Where there is no bishop, there is and can be no Church; and no man is a lawful bishop unless he can show that his 'orders' are derived from the apostles by unbroken succession. —This is the sense in which the Prelatic theory has been always maintained by the Ritualistic or sacerdotal party in the Church of England, as well as by the Greek and Roman Churches. The last-named Church puts the copestone on the theory by teaching that, as all local Churches must be subject to bishops, so all other bishops must be subject to the Bishop of Rome. Bishops who refuse subjection to the Pope cut themselves off from the unity of the body of Christ, and forfeit all title either to 'exercise jurisdiction or to confer orders.' At present our purpose is simply to state the theory, not to unfold the arguments by which it may be attacked or defended. One may well believe that thoughtful men cannot accept, without deep misgivings, a theory which obliges them to *unchurch* all professing Christians save those who belong to the Anglican, Roman, or Greek communions, and thus to exclude from the covenanted mercies of God and regular ministration of saving grace all the great Lutheran Churches of Germany and Scandinavia and Hungary; all the Reformed Churches of France and Holland, of Scotland, Ireland, and America, as well as the Nonconformist Churches of England. It would be unfair to attribute to all Episcopalians a theory so hateful in itself and so contrary to plain facts. It is earnestly repudiated, as we have seen, by very many of them. Yet it is difficult to see how these more Moderate Episcopalians can escape all responsibility for it, so long as they acquiesce in the law of the Anglican Church,

which treats all 'orders' as invalid except those of the Prelatic Churches;—the offensive law in virtue of which any Greek or Popish priest who chooses to conform to the English Church is eligible to office without re-ordination, whereas the most distinguished minister belonging to any of the Protestant Churches of Germany or France, of Scotland or America, is ineligible to office, and is utterly excluded from the pulpit, unless he will submit to the indignity of denying the validity of his previous ministry and accepting re-ordination.

Of the forms of polity which we have thus rapidly described, we believe that the Presbyterian is the one which agrees most perfectly with the polity according to which, by the authority of the apostles, the first Christian Churches were organized and governed—the polity which is enjoined both by precept and example in the New Testament. The essential features of it are principally these four, viz. :—

The Holy Ministry.

The Ruling Eldership.

The Association of neighbouring Congregations under a Common Representative Government.

The Concurrence of Popular Election and Official Ordination in the outward appointment of office-bearers.

Some of these features are found also in Prelacy and Congregationalism, but the four are not found combined except in Presbytery. They are the four pillars on which the Presbyterian edifice rests. It will be proper to look at them one by one, and consider the arguments from Scripture and experience by which they are sustained.

## Section I.

### The Holy Ministry.

This institution may well receive the first place here, for it has the honour of being recognised as of divine authority by Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists alike. For the same reason, the proof of its divine appointment need not be unfolded at great length. All who believe in the Christian Church believe that in the assemblies of the Church for public worship, there ought to be 'prayer and the ministry of the word' (Acts vi. 4). The only point in dispute relates to the question, Who are to offer the public prayers and to minister the word? Those who hold by the divine appointment of the holy ministry believe that these services ought to be entrusted to men set apart for the purpose,—men separated from every secular calling in order that they may give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word, as their vocation and life-work; and this (as we have seen) is the belief of all the historical Churches without exception.

The objections urged on the other side are chiefly two. In the first place, it is said that to entrust the ministry of the word to an official class is to dishonour the Holy Spirit, since it does not leave Him free to speak by whomsoever He will; it is to make provision for a spiritual work without taking the Spirit into account; it is to act as if human teaching and ordination could make a man a true minister of Christ, without the Spirit of Christ. It is objected, secondly, that to employ official ministers is to put a slight upon the spiritual gifts of private members of the Church. Since Christ does not confine His spiritual gifts to professional pastors and teachers, can it be right to confine to them the stated preaching of the word?

With respect to these objections, we freely admit that Churches and their pastors need to be often reminded that no man has a right, before God, to be a minister, unless Christ has called him

by His Spirit, and unless he looks up to Christ, day by day, for help and guidance. We admit also that the unofficial services of gifted brethren ought to be welcomed and called into requisition. But all this is perfectly consistent with a strong assertion of the divine authority of the Christian ministry. Because the ability to speak to the edifying of the Church is a spiritual gift, it does not follow that this kind of service should be left entirely to the unofficial ministrations of private members, who feel themselves moved to take it in hand. It is the will of Christ, not only that His people should be watched over and taught, but that there should be pastors and teachers in every Church—men regularly called and set apart to the work, to the exclusion of all secular avocations.

In proof of this we appeal (1) to *the example of our Lord in choosing the Twelve.* In prospect of His departure to the Father, Christ called to Him twelve of the disciples, and appointed them to be the official teachers and guides of the infant Church. These men He charged to leave off their secular callings, that they might give themselves wholly to the duties of their new office; and He directed that, while so employed, they should be maintained by the contributions of the faithful (Matt. x. 9, 10; 1 Cor. ix. 14, 15). This affords a presumption that official service will be found to have a place in the stated polity of the Church. It likewise affords, not a presumption only, but a proof, that official service—the employment of ordained and salaried officials—is nowise inconsistent with faith in the living Head of the Church, nor with a full recognition of the need and value of the grace of the Holy Spirit, nor with the duty incumbent on all the faithful, according to their respective gifts and stations, to do service unofficially and gratuitously in the cause of Christ. (2) We appeal to *the doctrine of the apostles, and their practice in relation to the first Churches.* Care was taken to appoint in every Church certain presbyter-bishops, whose business was, among other things, to labour in the word and doctrine—rulers and guides who were to speak to the people the word of God (1 Tim. v. 17;

Heb. xiii. 7). This, it is to be remarked, was not meant to be only a temporary or occasional way of providing for the edification of the Churches, like the raising up of apostles and prophets and evangelists. The ministry of pastors and teachers was to find a place always, and in all the Churches. The proof of this is not far to seek. There are three of the Epistles which have for their principal design to unfold the mind of Christ in this matter—the so-called Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus). These contain careful and full instructions regarding the election of the presbyter-bishops, the qualifications required in them, the mode of ordination, and the duties incumbent,—all which implies that these elders or bishops, together with the deacons (about whom similar instructions are given), are indispensably required in order to the due equipment of a Christian Church. The existence of these Pastoral Epistles is, therefore, a testimony to the necessity of the pastoral office.—One other remark may be added. The law laid down regarding the support of these teachers by the people whom they taught (Gal. vi. 6; 1 Cor. ix. 11, 14), shows that it was judged proper that they should be (to use a modern phrase) 'professional men,' that is to say, men trained for and devoted to the holy ministry as their life-work.

## Section II.

### The Ruling Eldership.

In the Presbyterian system, this office is on a par with the holy ministry itself in point of importance. In some respects it may even claim priority. A Presbyterian society may subsist for years without a minister, but it can hardly subsist without elders. In the beginning of the Scottish Reformation, several congregations were gathered and organized under the oversight of elders, freely chosen from among themselves, a good while before a single congregation was in a condition to have a pastor of its own.

Similar cases are of perpetual occurrence in the British Colonies. Besides, it is matter of every-day experience, that the death or removal of the minister of a settled congregation does not necessarily throw the life or work of the congregation out of gear; for, in the absence of a stated pastor, the elders, as the ordained and responsible rulers, are still entitled, and bound, to watch over the flock, and to see that the Lord's work goes forward without interruption.

What then, precisely, is the Presbyterian doctrine regarding this Ruling Eldership? It may be briefly stated thus: Every congregation or local Church ought to choose from among its members a company of men to be its rulers, the best in point of faith and holy life, as also in point of intelligence, good sense, and experience, to be found among them. These 'elders of the people,' having been thus elected by their brethren and solemnly set apart to the office, are, along with the pastor, to take the entire oversight of the flock. More particularly, they are to see that public worship is duly celebrated, and to decide in all cases of admitting or excluding members. In short, it is the business of the elders, in conjunction with the pastor, to see that the Lord's work in the congregation is duly set forward, and that all things are conducted in a decent and orderly way, according to the law of Christ.

It ought to be added that, although a Ruling Elder is, equally with the pastor, invested with spiritual office in the Church, so that the designation 'lay-elder' is a contradiction in terms, nevertheless he continues to be a layman in this sense, that he does not lay aside his secular calling, or subsist by his eldership. He is a layman in the very important sense of being a non-professional man. There may not, perhaps, be anything in the Presbyterian theory forbidding an elder to live by his office, like a minister of the word; but such an arrangement, even if it had been practicable (which it is not), would not be relished; for it would be felt to endanger one of the most valuable features in the elder's position, viz. his ability to enter fully into the views and feelings of the

people, and to stand forth in the character of their representative, as being one of themselves.

The Ruling Eldership may be said to be the institution most truly distinctive of Presbyterianism. It is objected to, although for very different reasons, by the generality both of Congregationalists and Episcopalians. The *Congregationalist objectors* are displeased with it because, as they think, it takes the government of the Church too much out of the hands of the people. 'When a scandal arises, Christ does not say, Tell it to the eldership, but, Tell it unto the Church. To the same purpose the Apostle Paul, in pointing out the right course to take with respect to the incestuous person at Corinth, addresses his charge to the Corinthian *Church* as such. What right have you to set the people aside and relegate all such business to a judicatory of elders?' So the Congregationalists argue. For our parts, we agree with them in thinking that the texts referred to are exceedingly important, as affording clear proof that the kind of Church government appointed by Christ and the apostles is popular, not hierarchical; and that the responsibility for the state of things prevailing in a Church rests, ultimately, not on the judicatories, but on the whole body of the people. But farther than this the texts do not oblige us to go. That which is done by the representatives of the people, freely chosen by them out of their own number, is really done by the people. The people of a town are justly reckoned to be the doers of everything which is done, in their name, by the Town Council. This is in accordance, not only with the common use of language, but also, and very specially, with the idiom of the Bible. In places without number, *all Israel* are said to have appeared before the Lord, when in fact it was *the princes and elders* who appeared. A man who stood his trial *before the judges* was said to have 'stood *before the congregation* in judgment' (Num. xxxv. 12, 24). On the same principle, when a scandal is reported to the company of the Elders, it may be truly said to have been reported to the Church.

The objection urged by *Episcopalians* is to the opposite effect

entirely. Instead of complaining, with the Congregationalists, that the ruling eldership takes the government of the Church out of the hands of the people, they complain that it puts the government too much into non-clerical hands. Ministers of the Church of England, accustomed to regulate the spiritual affairs of their respective parishes at their own discretion (so far as they are regulated at all; for there is no Church discipline), shrink with a kind of abhorrence from a system which entrusts the regulation of spiritual affairs to men who are not 'clergymen,' not pastors, but (as they say) mere 'laymen.' They forget that the elder of a Presbyterian Church holds a spiritual office as truly as the minister of the word. He has been chosen by his brethren to take part in the government of the house of God, and to exercise the oversight of their souls; and he has been solemnly ordained to this office. They forget, besides, that the entrusting of a chief share in Church government to non-clerical hands is as far as possible from being a practice peculiar to the Presbyterian system. The governing bodies of the Episcopal Churches of Ireland and the United States include laymen as well as clergy. As for the Church of England, it goes farther in this direction than any free Presbyterian Church in the world, for it entrusts the supreme spiritual government *altogether* to the laity. The Sovereign is declared to be 'the supreme governor on earth of the Church of England;' and the authoritative regulation of ecclesiastical affairs is exercised, in the last resort, by the Queen's judges. The whole body of the bishops and clergy are unable to alter a single canon, or to deprive a single clergyman, to prescribe a prayer or appoint a day of thanksgiving, without the permission and authority of the Crown. The peculiarity of the Presbyterian system, therefore, is not that it gives a large share in the government of the Church to persons who are not ministers of the word, but that it refuses to give to any man any share in Church government unless on these three conditions—first, that he is himself a Church member; secondly, that he has been called to office by the suffrages of his brethren; and, thirdly, that he has

been solemnly ordained to office in presence of the Church, as to a spiritual function in the body of Christ.

Passing from these objections, we have to inquire whether the Ruling Eldership is sustained by any positive warrant of holy Scripture. We believe that it is; and we adduce the following arguments in proof:—

1. *The Church, being a divinely instituted society, possesses the rights common to all societies, and, among the rest, the right of electing appropriate officers with authority to act in its behalf.* Although there had been no further intimation of the mind of Christ on the point, this would have been sufficient warrant for the ruling eldership. Scripture plainly teaches that it is the right (and the duty) of every Church to regulate its internal spiritual affairs according to the law of Christ. When a brother falls into scandalous sin, the Church—that is to say, the Christian society to which the brother belongs—is bound to look into the case, and has authority from Christ to adjudicate upon it (Matt. xviii. 15). The early history of the Corinthian Church furnishes a case in point. One of the members married his father's wife, yet he was suffered to remain in membership. The Apostle, exposing this unfaithfulness on the part of the Church, and calling for the deliberate expulsion of the erring brother, addresses himself to the whole community. We have already seen what is the true interpretation to be put on this. The Apostle did not mean that the trial and expulsion of the offender could only be performed by a general meeting of the Church members. There was no need for a mode of action so apt to breed confusion. The Church might very well do its part by means of a body of officers freely chosen to attend to such business. The action of this body of officers would carry with it the very same authority as would have attached to the action of the whole Church. When Christ gave to the Church commandment and warrant to exercise spiritual government over its members, He thereby authorized it to perform the duty by means of a standing committee of its wisest men. A divine command to

a community to perform a duty, which they cannot perform in the most efficient and orderly way except by chosen men of their company appointed to the office, is ample warrant for the election and appointment of such men, and invests their performance of the duty with divine authority.

2. The Ruling Eldership can plead more express warrant of Scripture. *The New Testament makes formal mention of 'rulers' as ordinary officers in the Church.* (See Rom. xii. 8 and Heb. xiii. 7, 17.) From these and other texts it is plain, that a congregation in which there are not some who rule and some who obey, is not a scripturally organized Church. It is no answer to this to point to the fact that, in the first of the texts just cited, 'he that ruleth' comes between two others, described as 'he that giveth' and 'he that showeth mercy;' yet no one pretends to find in this an argument for an order of 'givers' or an order of 'showers of mercy.' A moment's reflection will make it clear that *the function of rule* is one which, in its very nature, *implies an office of rule.* A man may 'give' or 'show mercy,'—a man may even 'teach' or 'exhort,'—without being invested with office for the purpose. But a man cannot 'rule' unless he is invested with official authority, either permanently or for the time. Regarding these rulers in the apostolic Churches, it is remarkable that *there is not, in the whole New Testament, one instance of a Church governed by a single ruler.* Christ invested with rule not one apostle, but twelve. Paul and Barnabas appointed a company of elders in every one of the Churches they planted (Acts xiv. 23). In the single Church of Ephesus it was not an individual ruler, but a company of rulers whom the Holy Spirit had made overseers; and, indeed, these officers of the Ephesian Church seem to have been a pretty large company (Acts xx. 17, 28). This plurality of rulers in every Church is a feature of the primitive polity which has long disappeared from all the Churches except the Presbyterian. It is not found anywhere among the Episcopalians; for the thing distinctive of their system is the entrusting of the government,

in every case, to a single prelate. The apostolic plan of assigning a plurality of rulers to every Church, and the Prelatic plan of assigning a plurality of Churches to every ruler, are as contrary as can be imagined. Nor is the case much different with the Congregationalists; for among them the function of rule is regarded as pertaining exclusively to the pastoral office; and a plurality of pastors in one Church, although perhaps favoured in theory, is, in fact, quite exceptional—as much so as among Presbyterians.

3. An additional argument for the Ruling Elder is based on *the apostolic appointment of a consistory of elders in every Church* (Acts xiv. 23). These, it is maintained, were for the most part rulers only, the preaching of the word being performed by a part, not by all. It is right to explain that, in regard to this argument, Presbyterians are not so perfectly agreed as they are in regard to the other two. Many of their most learned and able divines have inclined to the opinion that the elder of the New Testament was always a minister of the word, 'a pastor and teacher.' This is the opinion stated in the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (1821), and maintained in substance by Dr. Charles Hodge. It was favoured by the majority of the divines in the Westminster Assembly; so that although the Form of Church Government drawn up by them declares that the Scripture holds forth other 'ruling officers' in every congregation besides the minister, it does not style them 'elders.' Calvin, too, may perhaps be reckoned on the same side, although he cannot get rid of the impression that the primitive eldership was just a Presbyterian consistory. This hesitancy of the great Genevan Reformer is exactly reflected in the constitution of the Scottish Reformed Church. While distinctly treating the elder as a spiritual officer, and empowering him to take part along with the minister of the word in adjudicating on all matters, whether of administration or of doctrine, which come before the judicatories, the Scottish Church has always continued to put such a difference

between ministers and elders, in respect to ordination and otherwise, as implies an unwillingness to be committed altogether to the identity of the modern elder with the presbyter-bishop of the New Testament. The reader will do well to remember that the argument for the ruling eldership, founded on the identity referred to, is by no means the only, or the principal, argument on which the scriptural authority of the office rests. The principal arguments, and those on which all Presbyterians rely, are the two formerly adduced, viz.: That Scripture reckons rulers—a plurality of rulers—among the officers required in every regularly organized Church; and, above all, That Scripture lays on every Christian Church duties and responsibilities which cannot be discharged, in an orderly and becoming way, except by a standing committee of rulers appointed for the purpose; in other words, by a session of elders.

While making this explanation, we feel bound to add that the argument drawn from the New Testament Eldership is a stronger one than many are disposed to admit. (*a*) It is favoured by *the analogy of the Synagogue.* The elders of the synagogue were the rulers of the synagogue. This is important, inasmuch as the eldership was one of the institutions which the Christian Church inherited from the synagogue. (*b*) The *primitive plurality of elders in every Church* is a fact which forbids us to identify them with our modern 'pastors;' for experience demonstrates that a plurality of pastors is unattainable, save in rare and exceptional circumstances. (*c*) In the Acts of the Apostles, where 'the elders' came into view in so many places, they are seen, always and exclusively, in the character of a *governing* body. (*d*) When the Apostle writes: 'Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and in teaching' (1 Tim. v. 17), he is most naturally understood as implying that, while all the elders ruled, some of them did not teach. It might be going too far to affirm that the consistory of a primitive congregation consisted of a minister and a company of elders, exactly like

the Session of a modern Presbyterian congregation. In those first days, the distinction between the professional and non-professional officers of the Church was very far from being so sharply defined as it afterwards became. There were very few 'college-bred' men available for the ministry. In the paucity of trained teachers, the presbyter-bishops generally must have had to do a great deal of the preaching and teaching, in addition to their proper business of taking the oversight of the flock. In proportion as the Churches acquired an educated ministry, the functions of teaching and ruling would infallibly tend to fall apart the one from the other: and one can understand how, ere long, the terms 'presbyter' and 'bishop' would come to be appropriated to the ministers of the word, while those who only ruled would come to be known as the 'seniors of the people,' of whom mention occurs in some of the early Fathers. This theory of the primitive eldership is not peculiar to Presbyterians. The most eminent maintainers of it have been men who were not Presbyterians at all. It ranks among its supporters Dr. John Owen, the greatest of the English Independents, and Dr. Augustus Neander, the German Church-historian. The great outstanding facts are these: That there is no clear example of an elder who was not a ruler; that there is no clear example of rule exercised by one who was not an elder; that there were some elders who did not teach; that a good deal of teaching and preaching was done by some who were not elders. These facts taken together, if they do not warrant us *absolutely to identify* the modern ruling elder with the primitive presbyter, entitle us to deduce from the primitive presbyterate an argument in favour of some such office as that of our elder, and thus go to confirm the arguments previously unfolded, and on which we principally rely.

## Section III.

### The Associating of Neighbouring Congregations under a Common Representative Government.

Presbyterians do not deny that a single congregation may be a true Church, and may be capable of performing all the essential functions of a Church. But they hold that it is the right, and in all ordinary cases the duty, of neighbouring congregations to enter into such a close association with each other as to constitute one ecclesiastical body, under the oversight of a 'presbytery' or assembly of elders common to them all. This is contrary, of course, to the strict Congregationalist theory, according to which a Christian Church ought to embrace only such a company of professing believers as may, and ordinarily do, worship together in the same place. As our Bible warrant for the sort of association of a plurality of congregations in one Church which we contend for, we point to the facts recorded regarding the leading Churches of the first age. The Churches at Jerusalem, at Ephesus, at Corinth, although consisting of several congregations, were each governed by a single Company of Elders, and were each reckoned and styled one 'Church.' Another apostolic precedent is supplied by the meeting of the apostles, elders, and brethren at Jerusalem, related in Acts xv. and Gal. ii., and commonly known as the First General Council or the First Christian Synod. It is an approved example of a meeting consisting of men who were either apostles, or persons occupying public offices in their respective Churches and enjoying the confidence of their brethren in those Churches, and who were convened for the purpose of endeavouring to arrive at a common understanding about certain weighty matters of Christian morality and Church order, in which all the Churches were interested. It is an approved example, also, of the formulating of the result of the brotherly conference, in a carefully-

framed circular letter, which was thereupon sent to the Churches concerned, and accepted by them as regulative of their practice.

The argument deduced from these New Testament precedents is greatly strengthened by the testimony of Experience. Union is strength. Churches which subsist apart, like so many separate little commonwealths, cannot bring their forces to bear on the common interests, cannot stand for the defence of the truth or of each other, cannot set forward the work of the common Lord with conjoint forces, like Churches knit together in one ecclesiastical body. Moreover, union very often brings wisdom and peace. Misunderstandings will arise among the best of men, especially in small societies. Offences will arise in the purest Churches; and in small Churches men are peculiarly apt to be offended. Pastors will occasionally abuse their power by attempting to bring in doctrines and practices obnoxious to the people; and the people will occasionally abuse their power by attempting to harass their pastor, or to remove him altogether, without cause. No one needs to be told how ruinous are apt to be the effects of such misconduct, when the parties are left to fight out the battle among themselves to the bitter end. These are often prevented under the Presbyterian system, by the arrangement which entitles a superior judicatory, composed of the representatives of a plurality of congregations, to interfere in time, for the purpose of helping to clear up misunderstandings, or, if need be, for the purpose of subjecting the offending parties to sharp discipline.

## Section IV.

### The Concurrence of Popular Election and Official Ordination in the Outward Appointment of Office-Bearers.

To save confusion it will be convenient to fix attention, for the present, on the one office which all the Churches concur in regarding as of divine authority. A scripturally-ordered Church,

it is agreed, must have Ministers of the Word, must have 'pastors and teachers.' There remains the question: How are true ministers of Christ to be obtained? We know how some, at least, of the first Churches obtained theirs. Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every one of the Churches planted by them in Asia Minor. This mode of appointment ceased with the first century; for the apostles and their deputies, when they died, left no successors. In the absence of apostles, how may the Churches of our time secure for themselves pastors whom they may safely welcome as Christ's ministers? The question is a vitally important one. As might be expected, the answers given to it are many in number and extremely different in their tenor. On examination, however, they are found to arrange themselves into two groups, corresponding to the two very different conceptions men have formed regarding the proper nature of the Church itself,—those who hold the *Protestant* or *Evangelical* conception of the Church answering in one way, those who hold the *Hierarchical* conception answering in another.

1. The answer of the Hierarchists is summed up in the phrases *ministerial succession*, *Episcopal succession*, *apostolic orders*. It has been recently stated as follows:—'A man cannot possibly appoint himself a minister any more than he can baptize himself. Previous ministers must make him a minister, and they in their turn must have been ordained by those before them, and they again by earlier ministers, and so on till we come to St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John, and the other apostles, who, by the Lord's own royal charter of incorporation, and, as it were, under His hand and seal, were the first to send forth ministers into the Lord's vineyard' (*The Holy Catholic Church*, by Edward M. Goulburn, D.D., London 1874, p. 20). According to this theory, Christ gave to the Twelve the sole authority not only to plant and organize Churches, but to appoint in them pastors. These pastors, in their turn, were exclusively entitled to appoint others to succeed them, and to these they were entitled to transmit the power they themselves had received. Thus, by an unbroken

succession, the power has come down to our time, one generation of pastors transmitting the authority of the ministerial office to another. This is properly designated the *hierarchical theory;* for, according to it, the Christian community, the Church as such, has not received from Christ any authority to take order for the fulfilment of the ends for which it has been brought into existence. The authority to do this has been given, not to the entire community, but to the clergy. It is a prerogative hereditary in the clerical order. With more or less of qualification this doctrine, so utterly opposite to the teachings of Luther, has been maintained by many modern Lutherans. But it is more usually, and certainly with much greater consistency, maintained by Romanists and High-Church Episcopalians. In the form in which the theory is maintained by these, the hereditary power on which it lays so much stress is made the exclusive possession of *Prelatic bishops.* 'The one society which the apostles founded has been propagated only in the line of the Episcopal succession' (Goulburn, as above, p. 84). In other words, the 'power of the keys' which the apostles received from Christ, they delivered, not to the whole body of the faithful, nor to the company of presbyter-bishops, but to another order of men altogether, who must be carefully distinguished from the presbyter-bishops of the New Testament—the order of Prelatic or diocesan bishops. To these prelates alone it belongs, therefore, to ordain men to sacred office. Accordingly, those only are lawful ministers of Christ who have been ordained by a bishop to whom authority has been transmitted, along an unbroken line of bishops, from the apostles.

2. The other answer directs us to look away from the Hierarchy, with their boasted Episcopal succession, and fixes attention, in the first place, on *the Church itself, the body of the faithful.* The Church, being a community of divine institution, and having received commandment from the Lord Jesus to celebrate the ordinances of God's worship and to exercise authoritative oversight over its members, has clearly a divine right to obey. She is bound to obey her Lord's commandment, as she will be answerable to

Him at His coming. This being so, the Church is entitled and bound to appoint to be rulers and ministers of the word such of its members as it judges to have been called and qualified by Christ for these functions. And members thus appointed may well accept the appointment. The solemn call and appointment of the Church is sufficient warrant to enter on the duties of the sacred office. It is quite true that 'no man can make himself a minister.' But it does not follow that 'previous ministers must make him a minister.' Christ only can do that. And as for the right to judge whether Christ has called a given man to be a minister, and to admit him accordingly to the exercise of the ministry in a given place, this belongs ultimately to the community or local Church. It is here just as in the civil community. In that community no man can 'make himself a magistrate;' but it does not follow that 'the previous magistrates must make him a magistrate.' They have no right to make any man a magistrate unless the community have expressly given them authority to that end. The right and duty of appointing magistrates belongs ultimately to the community as such.—This, which may be called the *popular* as distinguished from the *hierarchical* theory of the Church and the ministry, was strongly maintained by Luther, and indeed by all the Reformers. It is held, in substance, not only by all Congregationalists and the great majority of Presbyterians, but by many of the most distinguished Episcopalians also. It is briefly expressed by Archbishop Whately in the saying that in the Church 'no official acts have any validity but what is derived from the community to which, in each case, the officer belongs' (*The Kingdom of Christ*, p. 210). According to the hierarchical doctrine, *the valid ministry makes the true Church;* according to the Protestant and scriptural doctrine, *the true Church makes the valid ministry.* Those are valid ministers who have received charge from Christ, through the call of their Church, to minister to it in holy things.

It is important to keep hold of the general principle now stated regarding the appointment of office-bearers in the Church. It

is well expressed in the declaration of the Confession of Faith (chap. xxv. 3): 'Unto this catholic visible Church, Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God.' The ministry has been given to the Church, not the Church to the ministry. The ministry depends on the Church, not the Church on the ministry. At the same time, it is necessary to bear in mind that a good principle may be recklessly applied. A Church may exert its power in a disorderly and mischievous way. Accordingly, while holding that the essential thing in the appointment of ministers, as of all office-bearers, is the consent of the Church, Presbyterians are strenuous in holding that, in all ordinary cases, ministers upon being elected by the suffrages of their brethren ought, after due trial of their qualifications, to be set apart to office by those who were previously in the ministry. This, accordingly, we have stated as the last of the four main pillars on which the Presbyterian polity rests, namely, the Conjunction of Popular Election and Official Ordination in the outward appointment of office-bearers. To every Church Christ has given authority to appoint its own officers; but He has, at the same time, distinctly enough indicated that the mode in which He desires the Church, in all ordinary cases, to exert its authority is that now described.

The *leading example* of appointment to office, under the eye of the apostles, is the one related in Acts vi. An appointment of deacons having been called for in the Church of Jerusalem, the order prescribed to be followed was this: First, the members of the Church were to elect the men they judged to be best qualified; then the persons thus elected were to be set apart by the apostles, with solemn prayer and the laying on of hands. The apostles were, at the time, the only regular officers in the Church; and this, doubtless, was the reason why the laying on of hands devolved on them. In subsequent ordinations, any company of presbyter-bishops—any company of church-officers who were competent to preach and give a charge on the occasion—might ordain. In proof of this, it is enough to refer to 1 Tim. iv. 14, where we are informed that ordination was 'by prophecy,

with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.' We may be reminded, indeed, that in the case to which this description refers, an apostle presided, and that his hands were laid on Timothy, along with those of the presbytery. Considering that Timothy was Paul's son in Christ, and was to serve under him in the gospel, it was an eminently reasonable and becoming arrangement that the great apostle should preside at his ordination. But it is surely a mistake to regard this action of the Apostle as weakening the proof that the authority to ordain belonged to the company of presbyters in the local Church. On the contrary, it distinctly strengthens it. The fact that the Apostle, although he was able to be present in person, was careful to associate with himself the local presbytery in the act of ordination, was a strong testimony to the possession of power by the presbyters of the Church, in relation to this whole business.

The order observed in the appointment of ministers in the first age of the Church was, therefore, as follows :—(*a*) The members of the Church being assembled and solemn prayer offered, there would be a discourse setting forth, among other things, the qualifications requisite in a Christian pastor. These qualifications are unfolded, more than once and with anxious care, in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. iii. 1–13; Tit. i. 5–9); from which we may safely infer that they would be unfolded and pressed on the attention of the assembled Church by the minister, whoever he might be, on whom it devolved in providence to preside in the church-meeting. (*b*) The brethren, having been thus reminded of their duty, proceeded to elect the person or persons whom they judged to possess the necessary qualifications, and to be in other respects suited to their case. Popular Election was the undoubted custom of the apostolic Church. There is not a trace of any other mode of appointment in the New Testament. The custom continued to prevail, especially in the election of bishops, for several centuries afterwards. In an official epistle, written about the year 254, Cyprian, after referring to the texts which prove that at first all Church officers, whether bishops,

presbyters, or deacons, were chosen 'by the suffrage of the whole fraternity,' mentions that the custom still kept its ground in the African Churches, and 'almost throughout all the provinces.' The story of Ambrose's election to be Bishop of Milan, A.D. 374, shows us popular election, and that in an extreme form, in unchallenged possession of the field, after nearly all the other customs of the apostolic age had been forgotten. It is rather remarkable that the Churches which are accustomed now to insist most strenuously on the authority of the Church of the third and fourth centuries, are the very Churches which most resolutely deny to the people the right to choose their own pastors. (*c*) The person or persons chosen were subjected to examination, to ascertain whether they were duly qualified (1 Tim. iii. 10, v. 22, 24). (*d*) Those who were found worthy were set apart to office, by the local presbytery, in presence of the Church, with prayer and fasting and the laying on of hands. There would also, without doubt, be a Sermon of some kind, and the delivery of a Charge (Acts xiii. 1–3; 1 Tim. iv. 14; comp. Num. xxvii. 18–23).

In the combination of Popular Election and Official Ordination, now insisted upon, the practice of the Presbyterian Church exhibits the golden mean between the two extremes of Congregationalism and Prelacy; conserving the better features to be found in those polities, but avoiding their weaker points. In Congregationalism, the strong point is the emphatic assertion made of the rights of the Christian community,—'the priesthood of all the faithful,'—and the effectual check put upon those hierarchical notions which are so apt to be generated in purely clerical bodies. The weak point is the tendency to reduce ordination to an empty and superfluous form; for although there is a general understanding among Congregationalists that the Church which has called a young man to be its pastor shall invite the pastors of neighbouring Churches to ordain him, this is not by any means held to be stringently obligatory; what is worse, the pastors thus invited are not authorized to subject the pastor-elect to trial, and to

forbid his settlement should he be judged by them unworthy. In the Presbyterian system, it has been found quite practicable to combine a jealous regard for the rights and liberties of the Christian people, with the firm exercise of authority on the part of the Presbyters.

A comparison of Presbytery with Prelacy would show results not unlike. The boast of Prelacy is its seemly order, its firm repression of mob-rule in the house of God, and its care to conserve the bonds which link the Church of to-day with the Church of earlier times. In these strong points the Presbyterian system may fairly claim an equal share; and it is totally free from the tendency to hierarchical and sacerdotal assumption so characteristic of the Prelatic bodies. Even in respect to agreement with primitive antiquity, the Prelatic Churches are far from having so much to boast of as many imagine. If it were not too great a digression, one could easily point out quite a number of the most valuable and characteristic institutions of the early Church which survive and are lovingly cherished in the Presbyterian Churches, although they have been long obsolete among the Prelatic bodies. A remarkable example of this occurs in the custom of expounding from the pulpit whole books of holy Scripture, in long courses of homilies. This custom, familiar in Scotland under the name of 'lecturing,' was constantly practised by the greatest of the Fathers, insomuch that, of the extant writings of Augustine and Chrysostom, a great part consists of reports of these pulpit expositions. It prevails to this day in all the Presbyterian Churches. In the Romish Church it is utterly unknown; in the Anglican Church, very rare. A similar agreement with primitive antiquity may be fairly claimed as belonging exclusively to the Presbyterian system in the point at present under discussion. The practice of the second and third centuries, as described by Cyprian, exhibits that precise combination of Popular Election and Official Ordination on which we have been dilating as one of the leading characteristics of modern Presbytery. Among other passages in which this comes

out, there is a very instructive one in an epistle written by Cyprian to Antonianus (Ep. lv. in the Oxf. ed.), in which he describes a bishop as having been made such 'by the appointment of God and His Christ, by the testimony of the clergy, and by the votes of the people.' (Comp. Gieseler, *Kirchen-Geschichte*, i. 372.) Of the three points here signalized, the *first* and *second* find worthy recognition, I will not say in all the Prelatic Churches, but at least in the Church of England; the *first* and *third*, in like manner, are duly recognised in the practice of the Congregationalists; the union of *all the three* is the specialty of the Presbyterian system.

What, then (to sum up), are the design and effect of the action thus concurrently taken by the Presbytery and the people? Shall we say that, when the people elect a man and the presbytery, after examination, sets him apart with prayer and the laying on of hands, the effect is to 'make him a minister of Christ'? Certainly not. It is not in the power of all the Churches, or of all the presbyteries and prelates in the world, to make any man Christ's minister. Christ only can do that. Pastors and teachers are not the Church's gifts to Christ, but Christ's gifts to the Church. The best of our people have always dreaded 'a man-made ministry' as a baneful evil in any Church. In common with all who truly 'hold the Head,' we believe that, in the case of every one who approves himself a true minister of Jesus Christ, it will be found that the separating of the man to the gospel, the calling of him forth, and the furnishing of him with the requisite knowledge and aptitude to teach, are all traceable to the Spirit and providence of Christ. What *the rulers of the Church* have to do, is to judge whether a given candidate, who professes to have been called by Christ, has been really so called—whether he gives evidence of the piety and gifts which are the proper tokens of a divine call. What *the people* have to do, is to judge whether the candidate possesses the peculiar gifts which warrant the belief that he is the man suited to them. When these two points are satisfactorily determined, the Presby-

tery, finding that the candidate professes to have been called by Christ, and that the reality of the call is attested by Christ's gifts and the suffrage of the people, proceeds to ordain him to office. The action of the Church is ministerial only. It does not make the candidate a minister of Christ; it only sets the Church's seal on him as having been already made one of Christ's ministers by Christ Himself, and admits him accordingly to the exercise of the ministry. (Comp. Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, i. 436.)

*Observation* 1.—**Bishop and Presbyter identical in the Church of the Apostles.**—The characteristic feature of the Prelatic form of Church government is its distribution of the Christian ministry into the three orders of Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons. Those who assert the divine right of Episcopacy maintain that these three existed, as distinct orders, in the apostolic Church, and that unless a given Church possesses all the three, it has no right to be regarded as a true Church at all. It is not constituted on apostolic principles. Since this audacious assertion continues still to make itself heard, it is important to observe that, in the writings of the apostles themselves, the term *bishop* is never once used to denote a different office from the *elder* or *presbyter*. Everywhere in the New Testament, *bishop* and *presbyter* are simply two titles for one and the same officer. The same minister who is called Presbyter or Elder, in allusion to his age or gravity (as certain civil dignitaries are styled aldermen, seniors, and senators), is likewise called Bishop or overseer, in allusion to the duty belonging to his office. For the proof of this, the reader is referred to Tit. i. 5–7; Acts xx. 17–28; Phil. i. 1. The proof is well stated by Jerome in his commentary on the first of these passages; and, as the reader may like to see how the matter presented itself to the mind of the most learned of the Latin Fathers, writing about 300 years after the last of the apostles fell asleep, at a time when Prelacy had long been firmly established everywhere, I will cite his words. After pointing out that the passage in hand assumes that '*bishop and presbyter are one and the same*,' he asserts that 'till the time that, by the suggestion of the devil, parties arose in the Church, and the people began to say, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, *the Churches were governed by the common counsel of the presbyters*.' He then proceeds as follows: 'Should any one suppose that it is my judgment only, not that of the Scriptures, that *bishop* and *presbyter* are one, the latter being a title of age, the former of office, let him read again the words of the Apostle to the Philippians, *Paul*

*and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons, grace to you*, etc. Philippi was a single Macedonian city, and certainly there could not be in one city a plurality of bishops, such as are now so called. But inasmuch as at that time they called the same persons bishops and presbyters, for this reason he speaks of bishops or of presbyters indifferently. Perhaps some one may think this ambiguous, unless confirmed by another testimony. Well, in the Acts of the Apostles it is written that, when the Apostle came to Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called the presbyters of that Church; and to them he said this, among other things, *Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock wherein the Holy Ghost hath set you as bishops, to feed the Church of the Lord*, etc. Here, again, mark carefully how, calling to him the presbyters of the one city of Ephesus, he thereupon speaks of them as bishops' (*Opera*, ed. Migne, v. 562). There is no resisting evidence so conclusive. The original identity of bishop and presbyter is acknowledged by all unbiassed divines, and cannot be modestly denied. The primitive bishop was not a bishop in the modern sense at all. He was an elder, and nothing more.

*Observation* 2.—**No Prelacy in the Apostolic Church.**—Since it is certain that the New Testament *bishops* were not *prelates*, the advocates of Prelacy are obliged to look elsewhere for arguments with which to sustain their polity. They appeal (*a*) *to the case of the apostles, and especially to the cases of Timothy and Titus*, whom the apostles employed as their assistants and deputies, leaving them to exercise superintendence over groups of newly-planted Churches. But these instances are not to the point. Neither the Twelve, nor such evangelists as Timothy and Titus, were regular officers in any Church. Their position did not correspond at all to that of the bishop of a diocese. It corresponded rather to that of a European or American missionary entrusted with the superintendence of a group of native Churches, still too weak to be left to themselves. It is the business of such a missionary to see that elders are appointed in every Church, that sound doctrine is preached, that divine service is duly attended to, and so forth; but he is not a regular officer in any one of the Churches, or in the collective Church, of his district. The cases of Timothy and Titus are valuable as showing that, for extraordinary duties, we may still expect extraordinary instruments to be raised up, and that the Churches are not absolutely limited to the two offices of the presbyter and the deacon. But Presbyters and Deacons are the only officers necessary to the full equipment of a Church in ordinary circumstances, the only officers, therefore, regarding whose qualifications and manner of appointment the Scripture has given directions. (*b*) *The angels of the Seven Churches* are maintained to have been Prelatic bishops in their

several Churches; and this is taken to prove that, if there was no Prelacy in the lifetime of the Apostle Paul, it had been introduced before the death of John, and with his sanction. But, considering the mystical style of the Apocalypse, it would not be safe to infer that, because each of the seven Epistles is addressed to the angel of the Church for which it is meant, therefore each of the Churches was governed by a single prelate. This would not have been safe, even if the contents of the Epistles had been consistent with that interpretation. But, in fact, the contents are quite irreconcilable with it. The sins reproved, the repentance enjoined, the works commended, are in no case those of an individual pastor. The Epistles, from beginning to end, address themselves to the respective Churches, as such, including pastors and people alike.—Prelacy has not the slightest foothold in the New Testament.

*Observation* 3.—**The Christian Ministry not a Priesthood.**—The term *priest* is ambiguous. Etymologically it is identical with *presbyter;* for, as Milton says: 'New presbyter is but old priest writ large.' This is the sense in which the term *priest* is used in the English Prayer-Book. That, in this sense, every Christian minister is a priest, we admit and maintain. But unhappily the word has long since come to bear, in ordinary use, a totally different sense. Not in English only, but in nearly all the other languages of modern Europe, it denotes a *sacrificer*, a *sacerdotal person.* This is the only sense in which it occurs in the English Protestant translations of the Bible, from Tyndal to the Revised Version of 1881. In these translations the term *presbyter* is always rendered *elder*, never *priest;* the latter term being restricted to sacrificing priests, like Aaron and his sons. It is too late to attempt to change a use of the word so widespread and inveterate. The English of the Prayer-Book, till it is conformed to the English of the Bible, will continue to convey to the congregations which use it, a view of the Christian ministry which the authors of the Prayer-Book would have been the first to repudiate. Anyhow, in denying that the Christian ministry is a priesthood, what we mean is that gospel ministers are not sacrificing priests.

According to the doctrine of the Church of Rome and of all Ritualists, every Christian minister, above the degree of a deacon, is a priest, and, as such, is ordained to offer sacrifice for the sins of the people, to sit in judgment on their consciences, and to absolve them authoritatively from their sins. According to the doctrine of all the Reformed Churches, the only true priest, in this sense, is Christ. His death was the only real sacrifice ever offered for sins, and it was offered once for all. He jealously retains in His own hand the right to judge men's hearts as to whether they do truly repent and believe or not, and to bestow or refuse pardon accordingly. As for the 'holy priesthood' attributed to the faithful in Scripture (1 Pet. ii. 5), it belongs equally to every

believing man and woman. It is such as entitles its possessors to reject all authoritative intervention between them and God, of the sort which the Sacerdotalists think themselves entitled to exercise.

After what was said before regarding the sole Headship of Christ, and also regarding the efficacy of the Christian Ordinances, it will not be necessary to go here into the discussion of the general question of priesthood in the Christian Church. It will be enough to remark—(1) That the *sacerdotal title* is never once given to any Christian minister in Scripture. Ministers are called bishops, presbyters, pastors, teachers, stewards, etc., but never once priests. (2) No *sacerdotal function* is ever attributed to Christian ministers. On the contrary, the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches, with remarkable precision and fulness, that the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices, having received their fulfilment in Christ, are abolished, and that no other official human priesthood, and no other atoning sacrifices, are to be introduced in their stead. The only passages which have any appearance of attributing priestly functions to Christian ministers, are those about binding and loosing, forgiving and retaining, in Matt. xviii. 18 and John xx. 23. But of these, the former refers exclusively to the infliction or removal of the outward censures of the Church; the latter, if it is not to be understood as having the same reference, points to that public proclamation of God's pardon and God's wrath which takes place in the ministry of the word. A *minister's* office is to say, 'Repent and believe; whosoever repents and believes, I am authorized to declare to him, in Christ's name, that his faith has saved him, and he is a forgiven man.' A *priest's* office is to say, 'Having examined thee, A. B., I find that thou art truly penitent, and accordingly I, in the name of God, pronounce thee to be absolved; and thou art absolved accordingly.' Absolution, in the former sense, every minister of the gospel is to pronounce; absolution, in the latter sense, is competent to Christ alone. (3) The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, bears witness that penitent hearts are welcome to transact directly with God in Christ about forgiveness and eternal life. There is not on record a single example of the authoritative intervention of a human priest in this great and vital business.

*Observation* 4.—**Validity of Presbyterian Ordination.**—This is a topic on which High-Church Episcopalians are accustomed to harp much. When they come to close quarters with a Presbyterian minister—let us suppose, a minister of the Scottish Church—they are fond of putting the matter thus: 'You profess to be a minister of Christ's Church. You hold yourself entitled not only to preach, but to minister the Sacraments. Who gave you authority to do so? Where are your credentials? You say you are an ordained minister. Yes; but that only raises the question, Who ordained you? Water cannot rise higher than its source.

No man can convey to another, authority which he does not possess himself. Who ordained the men by whom you were ordained? How can you demonstrate that yours are valid orders? We of the Anglican Church (and the priests of the Roman Church likewise) can face these questions. We were ordained by bishops, to whom authority to minister as God's priests, and to ordain others to the priesthood, has been transmitted through an unbroken succession of bishops from the apostles of Christ. You have no such authority to show. You do not so much as profess to be in possession of apostolic orders. This being so, you take too much upon you in acting as if you were ministers of Christ. You may be of some use as private religious teachers, but you are nothing more. Your ministration of ordinances is invalid, and cannot be expected to be effectual to convey grace to souls.'

How is our Presbyterian minister to make answer to this disdainful challenge? If he is a wise and devout man, he will probably take up the last part of it first, for it directly touches his Master's honour. 'Sir, you speak as if I laid claim to the possession of a power to convey grace into men's souls, by rites administered by me. I make no such claim. Christ has not suffered Himself to be superseded in that fashion. He is the sole Priest in God's house, and He will give remission of sins and spiritual life, with His own hand, to whomsoever He pleases. My endeavour is to teach my people to resort to Him as their Priest. I know that if they will do that, He will give them repentance and remission, holiness and life. I declare to them, in Christ's name, the gospel of the grace of God; and, to help the weakness of their faith, I minister to them the Sacraments by which the promise of the gospel is sealed. To profess to go farther would be to invade the prerogative of Christ.'

As for the other point, namely, that relating to the right to dispense ordinances, and the validity of ordinances as dispensed by a minister of the Presbyterian Church, the party called to deal with it is not so much the individual minister as the collective Church of which he is a minister, and particularly the congregation under his immediate care. Hearing the terms in which their pastor's 'orders' are challenged, the people may well put in a caveat to guard their own liberties and duty. 'We have received commandment from Christ to associate ourselves together for mutual oversight and edification. With a view to this, He has charged us, among other things, to celebrate the holy Supper in remembrance of Him. Do you seriously allege that, before we can obey this plain command, we must institute a search into the records of the past eighteen centuries, and ascertain that the person whom we have invited to minister to us is connected with the apostles by a chain of official ordinations in which there is

not one missing link, and in which every link is of sound quality? Our Lord Himself has given us no hint of such a thing. And it would take much stronger proof than has been forthcoming yet to convince us that we are bound, or at liberty, to refuse obedience to our Lord's commands till this portentous question about the valid orders of the clergy has been settled.'

But to return to our Minister—what has *he* to say for himself respecting the validity of his orders? It is possible he may have to pause and reflect for a little before making reply. Finding nothing in his Bible about Valid Orders and Apostolic Succession, he has not been accustomed to preach about them to his people, or to occupy his mind much about them in any way. However, he will not need to pause very long. For the hierarchist's challenge can be satisfactorily met by any man of good sense and Christian experience. The minister may fairly answer thus: 'I have never explored the memorials of the mediæval Church to verify the succession of bishops which your High-Church antiquaries profess themselves able to trace. I confess it seems to me sufficiently nebulous. One thing, however, is clear enough, namely this, that whatever has come *to you* by the unbroken ministerial succession, the same must have come *to me* also. I am a minister of one of the branches of the ancient Scottish Church—a Church whose history runs back into primitive antiquity. If it were worth while, I could certainly make out an ecclesiastical pedigree connecting me with John Knox and his brother Reformers. Farther back I cannot go with equal certainty. However, since Knox and his brethren were in the "holy orders" of the unreformed Church, the earlier part of my pedigree is, at least, as certain as yours can be.

'But, in truth, I do not care a straw for any such ministerial succession. If it is valid to make you, or to make me, a minister of Christ, it was equally valid to make Cæsar Borgia a minister of Christ, or Cardinal Beaton, or any one of a thousand other bad men who have stained with infamous crimes the clerical profession—men who wore the devil's livery, not Christ's, and did the works of the devil, not the works of Christ. A ministerial succession and ministerial authority shared by men like these equally with you or me, I cannot persuade myself to regard as of any value whatever.—The credentials to which I attach value as authenticating my commission to minister in Christ's house are of a much more substantial and persuasive sort.

'In the first place, I believe that *Christ Himself*, by the providential ordering of my lot, and by the working of His Holy Spirit in my heart, *called me to serve Him in the gospel*. I know that to some this will sound a very fanatical profession; but I may expect it to be more charitably construed by clergymen who have answered the questions prescribed in the English ordination

service. What is of more importance, I find that the prophets and apostles used to lay stress on this inward call. Jeremiah relates that, in an hour of wavering faith, he was tempted to lay down his office and "speak no more in the name of the Lord;" but the inward motion of the Spirit was too strong for him. *His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay* (Jer. xx. 9). So strong was the same sentiment in Paul's conscience that he declared: *Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.*

'I freely admit that this inward pressure and call, however decisive to my own conscience, are not sufficient of themselves to authenticate my commission to others. But they do not stand alone. They have, in my case, been *endorsed by the judgment of the Church.* This has been done three several times. In the first place, the presbytery, having carefully considered my profession of faith, together with my gifts and acquisitions, and the tenor of my life, gave me licence to preach the gospel. Then, secondly, the people of my present charge invited and solemnly called me to be their pastor. Lastly, this call of the congregation having been signified to the presbytery of the bounds, the brethren of the presbytery, after a fresh trial of my doctrine and gifts, and a fresh inquiry into my character, sustained the call, and thereafter, in Christ's name, ordained me to the ministry, and admitted me to the pastoral charge, with solemn prayer.

'My divine call and warrant to act as a minister of Christ have received yet another kind of authentication; about which, however, it would be neither becoming nor safe for me to say much, and which, if I must refer to it, I should prefer to unfold to my own flock rather than to strangers. You have ventured to affirm that the ordinary and regular ministering of saving grace finds no place, except in connection with the services of men possessing those Episcopal or apostolic orders of which you boast. But I know enough to make me certain that you are wrong. I have had the privilege from my childhood of knowing not a few saintly men and women who owed, under God, all that they were to the faithful ministrations of the Presbyterian Church. Many a time I have seen and felt the tokens of the Lord's presence in our congregations. Of myself I will not boast, further than to say that I do not think I could have continued year by year in the ministry, if I had not believed that I saw evidence that the Lord's salvation was being bestowed on souls even by means of my humble services. Appropriating the words of the Apostle, spoken with reference to those at Corinth who cast the same suspicion on the validity of *his* commission as you are casting on *mine*, I can cite as witnesses the members of my own flock and say: *Are not ye my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, yet at least*

*I am to you; for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord* (1 Cor. ix. 1, 2).'

1. *Describe the three rival forms of Church government.*
2. *In what respect does ordinary Congregationalism differ from Presbytery?*
3. *In what respect does New England Congregationalism approximate to the Presbyterian system?*
4. *Describe the difference between Moderate Episcopacy and High-Church Episcopacy. Estimate its importance.*
5. *Enumerate the four pillars of Presbytery. Indicate which of the four have a place in Episcopacy also, or in Congregationalism, or in both.*
6. *What current arguments against the office of the holy ministry are refuted by the example of our Lord in appointing the twelve apostles?*
7. *'Tell it unto the Church.' How is this understood by Congregationalists? and how by Presbyterians?*
8. *Is the Presbyterian Church singular in entrusting the government of the Church to 'laymen'?*
9. *State the argument for the Ruling Elder, drawn—*
   (*a*) *From the general principles of Scripture regarding the Church.*
   (*b*) *From express testimonies of Scripture.*
10. *Was it usual to have one presbyter-bishop, or more than one, in the first Churches? State the fact, and what may be inferred from it in relation to the claims of the rival forms of Church government.*
11. *Give New Testament instances of a plurality of congregations under one presbytery.*
12. *What is meant by apostolical succession?*
13. *Prove that popular election was the rule in the apostolic Churches.*
14. *Does ordination make the man a minister of Christ? If not, what is the meaning of it?*
15. *Prove that the elder and the bishop of the New Testament are identical.*
16. *What is a priest?*
17. *Tell the difference between absolution by a minister of the gospel and absolution by a priest.*
18. *What answer would you give to a High-Church neighbour when he denies your minister's right to dispense the Sacraments?*
19. *What did Paul point to as the seal of his apostleship?*

# INDEX OF AUTHORS AND TOPICS.


AMBROSE, 138.
American Church, 128.
Articles xxxix., 10, 57.
Augsburg Confession, 10.

BANNERMAN, 141.
Baptism, 71–76.
——— Infant, 73-75.
Benediction, 91–93.
Bingham, 109.
Bishop, 116, 130, 141.
Bunyan, 74, 75.
Butler, Bishop, 38.
*Byelaws*, 29, 60.

CALVIN, 87, 101, 128.
Catechism, Larger, 68, 80, 85.
——— Shorter, 66, 69.
Catholic Church, 11–18, 59.
Church power, 28–32, 53, 115.
Congregationalism, 113–116, 124, 128, 138.
Creeds, 40.
Cyprian, 137, 139.

DENOMINATIONS, 14.
Dexter, 114.
Discipline, 30, 81, 98–104.
'*Dominical*,' 3, 105.

ECCLESIA, 1, 3.
Episcopal succession, 133, 145.
Erastianism, 24, 33–35, 125.

FELLOWSHIP, 40–43, 77, 78.

GIVING to the Lord, 94–96.
*Gospel*, 61.
Goulburn, 133, 134.

HEADSHIP of Christ, 19, 22, 35, 53, 57, 140.
Hodge, Dr., 128.

INDEPENDENTS, 114.
Invisible Church, 16.

JEROME, 141.
Justin Martyr, 86.

KNOX, 9, 22, 63, 64, 87, 88, 116, 146.

LAY elder, 123.
Lay government, 125.
*Lecturing*, 64, 65, 139.
Liberty of conscience, 30, 32, 35, 58.
Liturgies, 85–88.
Lord's Prayer, The, 85.
Lord's Supper, The, 76–82.
Luther, 32, 116, 134.

MINISTERS, 26, 69.
Ministry, The holy, 120–122, 135, 143.
Missions, 48–51, 96.

NEANDER, 130.
New England Churches, 114, 115.
Nice, Council of, 109.
Notes of the true Church, 6–11, 62.

ORDERS, 116, 118, 145.
Ordinances, 21, 24, 26, 29, 52–60.
Ordination, 136–138.
——— Presbyterian, 144–148.
Owen, Dr., 114, 130.

Polity, 111–148.
Poor, 95, 109.
Popular election, 132–140.
Praise, 89, 90.
Prayer, 59, 83–89.
Preaching, 65.
Prelacy, 116, 124, 128, 133, 139, 142.
*Presbyter*, 141.
Presbytery, 112.
*Priest*, 143.
Priesthood, Christ's sole, 92, 143.
——— Universal, 32, 116, 143.
Psalms, 89.

Reading of the Word, 63, 64.
Ritualists, 118, 143.
Romanism, 9, 28, 54, 84, 118, 143, 145.
Royal supremacy, 125.
Ruling eldership, 122–130.

Sabbath, 96, 105–109.
Sacraments, 6, 10, 68–82.
*Sacramental grace*, 25.
*Scandal*, 100.
Scots Confession, 9, 10, 57.
'*Sound doctrine*,' 101.
Spiritual independence, 33–36.
Spurgeon, 114.
Synagogue, 106, 129.
Synods, 131, 132.

Union of Churches, 13–16.

Westminster Confession, 10, 12, 32, 35, 56, 136.
——— Directory, 63, 87.
Whately, Archbishop, 116, 135.
Wigton Martyrs, 28.
Word, The, 6, 10, 25, 61–67, 69.
Worship, 45–47.

# INDEX OF TEXTS.


GENESIS. PAGE

iv. 26, . . . . . 40

EXODUS.

xii. 48, . . . . . 74
xix. 6, . . . . . 32
xx. 4–6, . . . . . 56
xx. 24, . . . . 26, 55
xxii. 29, . . . . . 94
xxv., . . . . . 94
xxxv., xxxvi., . . . 94

LEVITICUS.

xix. 17, . . . . . 98
xxiii. 2, 3, . . . . . 106

NUMBERS.

vi. 22–27, . . . . 91, 93
vii., . . . . . 94
xxvii. 18–23, . . . . 138
xxxv. 12, 24, . . . . 124

DEUTERONOMY.

v. 14, 15, . . . . . 109
xii. 32, . . . . . 56

PSALMS.

lxvii. 1, 2, . . . . . 49
cvi. 4, 5, . . . . . 17
cxxxiii. 1, . . . . . 4
cxxxiii. 3, . . . . . 92

PROVERBS.

iii. 9, . . . . . 94

ISAIAH.

lviii. 13, . . . . . 109

JEREMIAH.

xx. 9, . . . . . 147

EZEKIEL.

xvi. 20, 21, . . . . . 75

ZEPHANIAH. PAGE

iii. 17, . . . . . 47

MALACHI.

iii. 10, . . . . . 94

MATTHEW.

iv. 9, 10, . . . . . 56
vi. 6, . . . . . 59, 84
vi. 7, . . . . . 85
vii. 16, . . . . . 8
viii. 11, . . . . . 17
x. 6, . . . . . 49
x. 9, 10, . . . . . 121
xv. 9, . . . . . 56
xv. 24, . . . . . 49
xvi. 18, . . . . 2, 20, 38
xviii. 15–18, . . 23, 126, 144
xviii. 15–20, . . 98–104
xxviii. 18–20, 29, 33, 48, 71, 72
xxviii. 19–20, . . 4, 20, 21

MARK.

xvi. 15, . . . . . 48

LUKE.

x. 7, . . . . . 95
xix. 10, . . . . . 37
xxiv. 47, 48, . . . . 48

JOHN.

iv. 24, . . . . . 83
xvii. 18, . . . . . 37
xviii. 36–38, . . 21, 22
xx. 19, 26, . . . . 105
xx. 21, . . . . . 48
xx. 23, . . . . . 144

ACTS.

i. 8, . . . . . 48
iv. 23–30, . . . . . 85
vi., . . . . . 136

ACTS—*continued.* PAGE

vi. 4, . . . . 83, 120
vii. 38, . . . . 1
ix. 31, . . . . 2
x. 47, . . . . 72
xiii. 1–3, . . . . 138
xiv. 23, . . . 127, 128
xv., . . . . 131
xvi. 25, . . . . 90
xvii. 25, . . . . 56
xix. 32, 39, 41, . . . 1
xx. 7, . . . . 105
xx. 17, 28, . . . 127, 141
xx. 32, . . . . 17
xxi. 20, . . . . 2

ROMANS.

i. 16, . . . . 62
viii. 9, . . . . 24
x. 14, . . . . 50
xii. 1, . . . . 45
xii. 3–8, . . . 41, 127
xiii. 4, . . . . 20

1 CORINTHIANS.

i. 17, . . . . 62
v. 4, . . . . 23, 99
vii. 14, . . . . 75
vii. 23, . . . . 31
ix. 1, 2, . . . . 148
ix. 14, . . . 95, 121, 122
x. 16, 17, . . . . 78
xi. 13, 14, . . . . 56
xi. 20, . . . . 105
xi. 23–25, . . . . 59
xi. 26, . . . . 77
xii. 12, . . . . 19
xii. 21, 22, 25, . . . 41
xiv. 19, 35, . . . . 2
xiv. 24, 25, . . . . 44
xiv. 26–40, . . . . 56
xiv. 26, . . . . 89
xvi. 1, . . . . 96

2 CORINTHIANS.

iii. 1, . . . . 12
viii. 9, . . . . 96
xiii. 14, . . . . 91

GALATIANS.

i. 10, . . . . 56
i. 15, 16, . . . . 27

GALATIANS—*continued.* PAGE

ii. 4, 5, . . . . 56
v. 1, . . . . 56
vi. 6, . . . . 95, 122

EPHESIANS.

iv. 7–11, 16, . . 26, 41
iv. 11, . . . . 23
v. 18–20, . . . . 89
v. 23, 25, 27, 30, . . 2

PHILIPPIANS.

i. 1, . . . . 141

COLOSSIANS.

ii. 19, . . . . 24
ii. 23, . . . . 56

1 TIMOTHY.

ii. 1–5, . . . . 88
iii. 1–13, . . . . 137
iii. 10, . . . . 138
iii. 15, . . . . 38
iv. 14, . . . . 136, 138
v. 17, . . . . 121, 129
v. 22, 24, . . . . 138

2 TIMOTHY.

iii. 16, 17, . . . . 62

TITUS.

i. 5–9, . . . . 137, 141

HEBREWS.

x. 23–25, . . . 4, 41, 66
xii. 23, . . . 2, 18
xiii. 7, . . . . 122
xiii. 7, 17, . . . . 127
xiii. 16, . . . . 94

1 PETER.

ii. 5, 9, . . . 32, 47, 143
iv. 10, . . . . 42
iv. 11, . . . . 66

2 JOHN.

ver. 11, . . . . 96

3 JOHN.

ver. 8, . . . . 95

REVELATION.

i. 10, . . . . 105
i. 17, 18, . . . 23, 25
ii., . . . . 101, 143

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